

# First Things First

Newsletter of the Western Maryland Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous

## “There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders...”

*Shirley C., New Life Group*

When I first came to Alcoholics Anonymous, I had tried everything I could to stay free from addiction, depression, and suicide. Alcohol, my medicine, had made matters worse. When I went to my first meeting, I did not know what I wanted from it. Gradually, I became more honest with myself. I was willing to let the program support me. I am convinced a Higher Power brought me to A.A. because I had said my first honest prayer: “God, help me.” That was the beginning of a long journey toward life-changing sobriety.

Back in 1989, mental and emotional issues were seldom discussed at meetings in this area. Some seemed to believe these challenges had nothing to do

with sobriety. I lost a friend in the program who could not cope with my depression. Let me say, it was not necessarily unfair. Over the years I have had trouble coping with it, too.

The use of medication was not always seen as ‘being sober.’ I once helped take a person to the hospital because she had stopped all psychiatric meds in an effort to be ‘sober,’ and, I might add, to be accepted. At one meeting I attended a person went on and on about stopping meds because it would lead to abuse. I spoke up and said that I took meds and I was sober. I was asked if I took them as prescribed. I said, yes, and I would be glad to talk about it after the meeting. The disgruntled member immediately backed down. The Big Book admonishes us to take problems that need a doctor’s help to a doctor. For those of us who are not doctors, it is dangerous to give advice about how to treat mental health ailments (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 133).

Shortly after my first anniversary, I had to admit myself to a hospital because of

See *Mental health* on page 2

“...but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.”

—*Alcoholics Anonymous* p. 58



## What does A.A. say about mental health and medicine?

“Dual diagnosis is common, but I want to say that treating my mental illness has helped my life exponentially. I can answer the phone, speak in front of strangers, make friends; my moods are more stable and I now have the life skills to manage mania and depression when they come. I no longer have to reach for the bottle, as it was never the cure I thought it to be; it was a mask, and nothing ever got resolved by drinking – all my problems were still there, just waiting for me to sober up.

Though I manage my mental illness, I still need to manage my alcoholism by going to meetings, actively participating, speaking with my sponsor, and living the Twelve Steps in my daily life. Without these things, I am living but half a life. Dealing with my mental illness allowed me to fully focus on being an alcoholic, and today I can confidently say I am a recovered alcoholic.

A.A. has helped me to regain happiness, love and tolerance for others; the gift of a higher power; and emotional stability. I now have a relationship with my parents and sister that I did not have before, and I am looking forward to college in the future. Sober and grateful, I thank the people in the Fellowship for allowing me to keep coming back until the miracle happened for me. The miracle will happen for you, too, if you are willing.” **(Carlee’s story)**

**From the General Service Conference-approved pamphlet, “A.A. for Alcoholics with Mental Health Issues”**

“We recognize that alcoholics are not immune to other diseases. Some of us have had to cope with depressions that can be suicidal; schizophrenia that sometimes requires hospitalization; bipolar disorder, and other mental and biological illnesses. Also among us are diabetics, epileptics, members with heart trouble, cancer, allergies, hypertension, and many other serious physical conditions.

Because of the difficulties that many alcoholics have with drugs, some members have taken the position that no one in A.A. should take any medication. While this position has undoubtedly prevented relapses for some, it has meant disaster for others.

...It becomes clear that just as it is wrong to enable or support any alcoholic to become re-addicted to any drug, it’s equally wrong to deprive any alcoholic of medication, which can alleviate or control other disabling physical and/or emotional problems.”

**From the General Service Conference-approved pamphlet, “The A.A. Member – Medications & Other Drugs”**



**A.A. for Alcoholics with Mental Health Issues**



**The A.A. Member – Medications & Other Drugs**

**Mental health continued from p. 1**

deepening depression. I was confused. I had taken the first three Steps, had a sponsor, prayed, attended meetings, and read the literature. Why was I still feeling like this?

That was the point where I came to understand that the Steps could be a framework for living along with other help I needed for this special problem. I had to accept help wherever I came to believe my Higher Power was pointing. Counseling and psychiatric care made it possible for me to become more and more honest with myself in my journey in sobriety. Recovery is about body, mind, and spirit.

Today there may be still a few local A.A.s who believe those taking meds — even as prescribed — are not sober. However, I see many others being understanding and accepting of how the Steps guide us in achieving the honesty we seek in working with professionals. We are becoming more comfortable in revealing how the complications in our own lives have been intertwined with addiction.

There is power in the act of speaking of one’s own unique journey toward sobriety. Hopefully, some will say, “If he (she) can do it maybe I can too.”

# “Gleanings” booklet highlights history of A.A. in Maryland — but only up to 1995

A series of A.A. history articles, written in the 1990s and researched by Bob R. And Bill R., has been collected in booklet form and can be found on Area 29 Maryland General Service’s website, [marylandaa.org](http://marylandaa.org).

Included are articles about A.A. pioneers in Maryland and the growth of the Fellowship in Baltimore, Southern Maryland, the Eastern Shore, North Central Maryland, Northeast Maryland, and Western Maryland. Because documentation of A.A.’s early history has been hard to find, the authors relied heavily on memory or memorabilia of old-timers.

Excerpted below is **Part 6: A.A. Settlements in Western Maryland (Written March, 1995)**.

Alcoholics Anonymous came to the principal population centers of Western Maryland — Hagerstown, Cumberland, and Frederick — during the three-year period 1946, 1947, and 1948.

## Cumberland

Like newspapers in many other locations, *The Cumberland Times* played an important role in A.A.s beginnings there. With a Sept. 4, 1947, headline, “Alcoholics Anonymous Will Organize Locally September 11,” the article said that A.A. was going to have a formal organizational meeting at City Hall Sept. 11, and then went on to give good background information on alcoholism and A.A.

A Sept. 12 follow-up article reported, “Fifty-six persons, including business and professional men, took steps last night to organize a local unit of A.A. after listening over two hours to testimonials by members from Baltimore, Uniontown, Morgantown, and Hagerstown at a City Hall meeting... The first meeting of the new group will be held tonight at the home of one of the members...”

It began this way: In 1947, a prominent man’s wife had a close friend from the Cleveland, Ohio, area, who offered help for her alcohol problem. This eventually led to the two newspaper articles, the public meeting, and the formative meeting in the basement of the wife’s home.

The first official group met at St. Mary’s Church. After the meetings, the members would gather at the



This postcard from the 1950s shows Emmanuel Episcopal Church on Washington Street in Cumberland, which became “the most consistent meeting place” for early A.A. in Cumberland. Meetings are still held there at 8 p.m. on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Find out more about A.A.s early history in Maryland here:

**[Gleanings from Maryland’s A.A. History](#)**

home of another member. In the early 1950s, meetings were held in the old Union Street School building’s health department. Over the years, the most consistent meeting place has been the Emmanuel Episcopal Church.

Original members helped form groups in neighboring communities. Members would carpool to attend area meetings, including West Virginia, and special events, such as the spring Claret Retreat for spiritual growth, held at Buckeystown, and the fall Sessions by the Sea in Ocean City. From the beginning until the present, a devoted cadre of women helped carry the message. An active core of members had their phone numbers listed for 12th Step work.

The Cumberland group from time to time had club rooms in various locations, including the YMCA and the O’Neal Halfway House. For a short time, public meetings were held Sunday evenings in the hospital auditorium and had as many as 100-125 attendees.

Of special note has been the enthusiastic support of members in the professional community activities. They worked closely with the clergy and people in industry, law enforcement, and health and social care.

**See “Gleanings” on page 6**



# Finding a ‘routine of recovery’ helpful for sobriety and spiritual growth

**Carol C., HOW Group**

As I face the many questions of recovery that I still don’t have satisfactory answers to, I return again and again to the Serenity Prayer: “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change” (pretty much everything!), “courage to change the things I can” (only how I respond and interact with life), “and wisdom to know the difference.” This prayer along with the prose poem, “The Desiderata” by Max Ehrmann, found me at the beginning of the worst years of my addiction, and I believed them – every word of them — and recited them to myself over and over, leaving out the word God, as at that time, I hated the whole idea of religion. These two prayers formed the base of recovery for me before I ever found A.A. They defined for me what it meant to be sane in a world reeking of chaos. And I was insane. Poor judgement, terrible survival skills, victim waiting to happen, always repeating the same sorry stories and getting the same dreadful results. Looking for love in all the wrong places, as the song goes.

But then I found love in a 12-Step program, and it wasn’t embodied in skin and bone. I became able to listen and not take everything as a personal affront, immediately jumping to the defense of a defenseless life and erratic emotions. Even while I tried to change what I could (where I lived, worked, who I slept with, how I spent

my free time) I never understood that the real change needed to be within me not around me. I accepted *everything* as things I could not change and therefore became a victim of victimizers, scammers, users, and liars. There was the insanity!

The more time I practice these Steps and explore the layers of myself newly exposed, I am more and more certain that recovery is not so much just bouncing back from the physical poisoning I endured

for decades but to recover the child I buried there. My true self – and the purpose I was designed specifically for. Else, why am I still here? I could not accomplish anything buried in lies I told myself or that others told me that made me so uncomfortable in my own skin that I tried to take my life in despair. But with the practicing of these Steps and the revelations daily, I find about what I’ve done and how I’ve felt doing it, I slowly realize the actual truth about myself.

So, I have developed a routine over the years because routines are soothing and comforting. I awake to care for my pets. I accepted the role of guardian to them long ago and it is a commitment I take seriously. God’s creatures, all of us, great and small. Then I read from some of the recovery and inspirational literature

I have collected over the years. I take some time with quiet music to write in my “dump book” whatever comes to mind, freeing space for God’s voice as I enter two-way prayer with a small group I’ve been with now four years. I attend a meeting and try to



## ‘routine of recovery’

Author’s definition: A sequence of actions regularly followed to preserve self from harm, ruin, or loss, or a reversal of an undesirable situation returning me to a normal state of health or preferable state of mental/physical health in order to regain possession or control, or to correct something resulting in an improvement in a given criteria or characteristic. May involve medical care for an illness or injury and buying or obtaining assets or objects lost [or never acquired].

# Thanksgiving at Fort Recovery

Starting at 1 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day

Thursday, Nov. 28, 2024

## Happy Thanksgiving!

418 N. Centre St.  
Cumberland, Md.

### **Routine continued from page 4**

absorb bits and buttons of wisdom from the fellowship every day. I hold service positions to help keep meetings going and available to other strugglers five out of seven days and finish with an all-addictions emotional sobriety meeting at 3 p.m. most days to keep my other obsessive addictions in check. I speak at the local rehab as often as I can.

I know I ought to spend time every evening reflecting on my day, but I seldom do that. I am trying to use more tools to help break my tendency for isolating and find that while meditation and prayer increases my conscious contact with my Higher Power it is also time I am isolating.

These are the basics of my routine that remind me daily that I am powerless over my impulsive, obsessive thoughts when I do not live in the breath, that not a single external



The Desiderata, a prose poem written in 1927 by Max Ehrmann, has been used as a devotional by people of many faiths and is included among A.A. prayers at <https://silkworth.net/alcoholics-anonymous/desiderata/>

influence can relieve me of these impulses, and that I must absolutely trust that the God of my understanding can and will. I know I will be shown how to release everything that does not serve my HP or my fellows and guide me closer to the perfect little soul that was delivered without any judgements on January 19, 1958 to parents (who immediately began judging and molding me into the girl their realities told them would best survive and thrive).

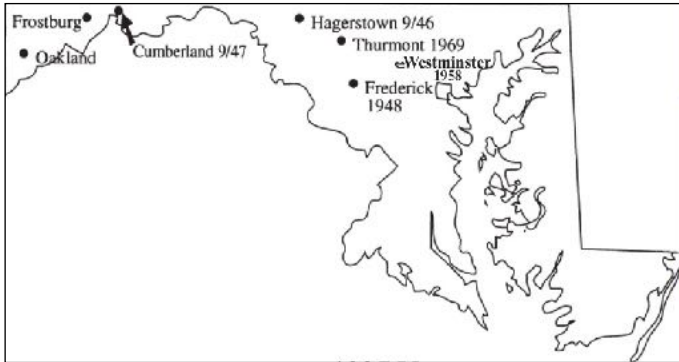
I know this is a little all over the place, but the reality of recovery has been like that for me. But like a metronome, I have discovered a rhythm that absolutely keeps me on track towards full recovery.

Thank you, Alcoholics Anonymous!



# A.A. in Maryland Then...

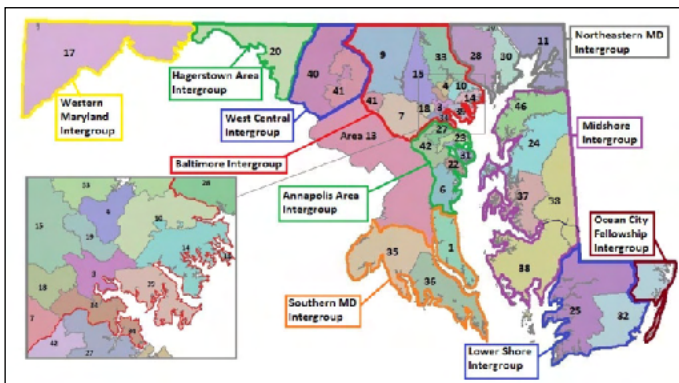
A.A. meetings in Western Maryland in 1995



	Start date	1995 weekly meetings	Population
Cumberland	1946	15	23,500
Frostburg	?	4	8,000
Frederick	1948	11	40,000
Hagerstown	1946	10	35,500

# Now...

A.A. meetings here and statewide today



	Estimated weekly A.A. meetings	Population
Cumberland area	30	20,000
Frederick area	140	85,800
Hagerstown area	63	43,500
Maryland	886 active groups 11 Intergroups 35 Districts (numbered as shown on map)	6.2 million

**"Gleanings" continued from page 3**

They actively carried the A.A. message to halfway houses in various ways.

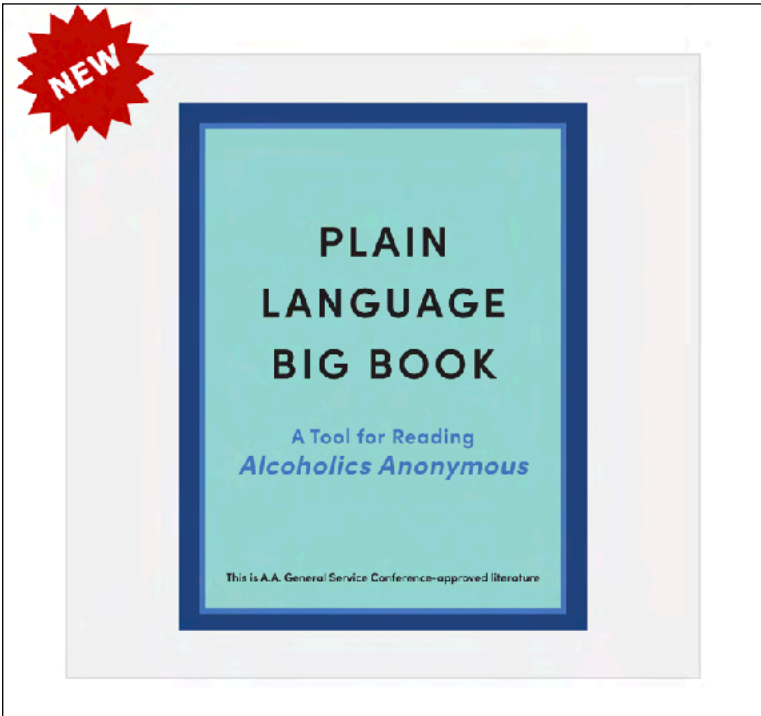
In the early days, members established an effective relationship with Mercy Hospital in Johnstown, Pa., and were able to admit alcoholics needing inpatient care with little fuss. This same procedure and cooperation was introduced at Cumberland's Sacred Heart Hospital and worked efficiently for a time. Eventually, increasing regulations and bureaucracy made such close cooperation impractical.

About five years ago (1990), the last two attendees at the original City Hall meeting passed away. Both were in their mid-80s and had remained dedicated A.A. members.

The Cumberland region has 19 weekly meetings (see diagram to left). An Intergroup committee provides a 24-hour answering service, has a yearly Gratitude Breakfast fundraiser in May and meets monthly to discuss service needs.

Read more about A.A.'s history in Maryland on Area 29 Maryland General Service's website or click here:

[MarylandAAGleanings](#)



The Plain Language Big Book is now available at A.A.'s Online Literature store, [onlineliterature.aa.org/Plain-Language-Big-Book](https://onlineliterature.aa.org/Plain-Language-Big-Book).

Copies are \$11 each. The new book is a tool to help readers understand the book, "Alcoholics Anonymous, which was first published in 1939. It is designed so that the A.A. Twelve Step program of recovery from alcoholism may be easily understood by all people who have a desire to stop drinking.

# What happened at the meetings?

## Western Maryland Intergroup, Sept. 20, 2024 meeting minutes

### Attendance

Dan, Farren, Lora, Cody, Mary Jo, Kristin

Call to Order at 6:14 pm  
Adjourned at 7:20 pm  
Serenity Prayer  
Traditions - Kristin  
August minutes approved.

### Treasurer: Farren S.

Starting balance: +3501.27  
Hotline (Dan) – 36.78  
Rent - 3.00  
Chapel Hill Group Donation +100  
Wendall printer - 172.72  
Ending Balance: \$3428.55

Savings Acct: \$23.02  
Reserve fund: \$2191.31  
Approved Treasurer's report.

### Institutions Chair: Les W. (Cody B.)

- Les is still taking meetings into Massie on Wednesday and Saturday. Massie is on lockdown right now.
- Lora is taking meetings into ACDC every other Wednesday. Jail said no to *Grapevine* subscriptions and updating tablets.
- Cody is taking meetings to GCDC on Thursdays.

### Activities Chair: Kenny L.

- Kenny was not in attendance.

### Newsletter Chair: Kristin B.

- Kristin brought 50 copies of the newsletter for each of us and will take a few newsletters to each group to hand out.
- Going bimonthly for a newsletter.
- There's a piece in the newsletter about what Intergroup does.
- Discussed restarting the District.
- Don't want to lose Intergroup reps to GSRs instead.

### Website Chairs: Wendell

Wendell did not attend. He did send the new statistics.

- 130 unique visits
- 172 sessions
- 332 page views
- The next release is September 2024.
- Holding off on printing the Where & When handouts.

### CPC Chair: Woody

- Woody was not in attendance.

### Literature Chair: Les W.

- Allegany House received their *Grapevine* subscription and sent a nice card.

### Hotline Chair: Dan B.

- Received three calls in August that were answered.
- Will rewrite the Hotline information in the Bylaws.
- Mary Jo volunteered for answering the hotline.

### Old Business

- Nominate President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer positions will be discussed and start on January 1, 2025

### New Business

- Lora will email Kevin (Hagerstown) that it's OK if they come to our next meeting and do what they will with the day, time, and location.

### Nominations

- Farren was nominated for Secretary.
- Cody volunteered for President.
- Lora was voluntold for Vice President
- Wendell was nominated for Vice Chairperson.
- Kristin and Jim were nominated for Treasurer.
- Need new positions filled.
  - New CPC
  - New Activities

## Western Maryland Intergroup, Oct. 18, 2024 meeting minutes

### Attendance

Dan, Farren, Lora, Cody, Mary Jo, Kristin  
Call to Order at 6:09 pm  
Adjourned at pm  
Serenity Prayer  
Traditions - Dan  
September minutes approved.

### Treasurer: Farren

Starting balance: +3391.77  
Rent + 9.00

Sunday Serenity Donation +100.00  
Sick & Tire + 25.00  
Lake Group Donation + 147.50  
Coffee Club Donation + 75.00  
Ending Balance: \$3739.27

Savings Acct: \$23.02

Reserve fund: \$2191.31 Approved Treasurer's report.

See Meeting on page 9



**Meeting continued from page 8****Institutions Chair: Les (Cody)**

- Les is still taking meetings into Massie on Wednesday and Saturday. Massie is open again.
- Lora is taking meetings into ACDC every other Wednesday.
- Cody is taking meetings to GCDC on Thursdays.

**Activities Chair: Mary Jo**

- We vacated the chair and voted in Mary Jo.

Newsletter Chair: Kristin B.

- Sent the Area 29 newsletter.

**Website Chairs: Wendell**

Wendell did not attend. He did send the new statistics.

- Sent 200 where and whens.
- Distributing where and whens in Garrett County.
- Purchased new ink for the new printer since the one that came with was not good.

**CPC Chair:**

- Vacate the chairperson.
- Need a new chair.

**Literature Chair: Les**

- Les did not attend.

**Hotline Chair: Dan**

- Five calls to the hotline in September.
- Most of the callers are interested in meeting information.
- One caller was interested in taking a meeting into the prison.
- Excited about Mary Jo, our new volunteer.

**Old Business**

- Lora will email Kevin (Hagerstown) that it's OK if they come to our next meeting and do what they will with the day, time, and location.
- Dan talked with someone about renting a bus to Annapolis. Asked for a quote.
- Discussed the difficulty in planning an event and getting people to attend.

**New Business**

- Kristin suggested that we send an anniversary sheet for each AA group in Cumberland and ask members who want their anniversary included on the website and in the newsletter.
- When handing out the anniversary sheet, ask each group to send an Intergroup rep to our Intergroup meeting. We need new members.

**Newly nominated positions**

- Cody was voted President.
- Farren was voted Secretary.
- Dan was voted Vice President
- Kristin was voted Treasurer.

*First Things First* is published bi-monthly by the Western Maryland Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous.

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**24-hour Hotline:** 844-568-3422, or 844-LOVE4AA

Submissions are welcome! If you have an idea or a story, send us an e-mail.

The views expressed in *First Things First* represent those of individuals and do not imply endorsement by Alcoholics Anonymous.



## A Declaration of Unity

This we owe to A.A.'s future: To place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

[1970 International Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous in Miami, Fla.](#)

# A.A. RESOURCES

box  
**459**

General Service Office  
Newsletter

[aa.org/box-459](http://aa.org/box-459)

A.A. Grapevine PODCAST



[www.aagrapevine.org/podcast](http://www.aagrapevine.org/podcast)

Meeting Guide App



[aa.org/meeting-guide-app](http://aa.org/meeting-guide-app)

A.A. on YouTube



[YouTube.com/  
@alcoholicsanonymousworldse1](https://www.youtube.com/@alcoholicsanonymousworldse1)

A.A. World Services  
Literature



[onlineliterature.aa.org](http://onlineliterature.aa.org)

# Get involved in Intergroup!

**Help Western Maryland Intergroup carry the A.A. message by becoming your home group's Intergroup representative! There are lots of ways to get involved:**

- If you have at least a year of sobriety, we need your help taking A.A. meetings into the Joseph S. Massie unit at the Finan Center. Intergroup brings a speaker into Massie twice a week — on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. If you would like to speak at Massie contact Les W., at 240-727-1921.

- We need volunteers for our hotline. During set hours, you would answer 12th-Step calls from your own phone and direct callers to local resources.



- Write an article for the newsletter! Submissions are welcome.

- Share your anniversary date with us so we can include it in the newsletter. Follow the prompts at [westernmarylandaa.org](http://westernmarylandaa.org)

- Help us plan and host workshops and activities for local A.A. groups.

**Intergroup meets at 6 p.m. the third Friday of each month. Our next meeting is Friday, Dec. 20, at Frostburg Presbyterian Church, 35 S. Broadway St., Frostburg. Find more information at [westernmarylandaa.org](http://westernmarylandaa.org).**

## September/October Group contributions — thank you!

<b>Sick and Tire</b>	\$25.00
<b>Lake Group</b>	\$147.50
<b>Sunday Serenity</b>	\$100.00
<b>Coffee Club</b>	\$75.00
<b>Chapel Hill</b>	\$100.00

## A.A. Co-founder Bill W. reflects on gratitude in 1958 essay



**T**his is Thanksgiving time; our gratitude should certainly be boundless. Twenty-four years ago this month, I landed in a hospital for the last time. Then and there I received the gift of sobriety. Like all who have since joined AA's ranks, I was given a chance to choose what I would do with my new life. Just like most AAs of today, I chose to try to pass my gift on to the next suffering applicant.

This simple practice of trying to give of one's self without demand for reward (at least sometimes!) has brought incredible blessings--more than my share, I guess. Every practicing AA comes up, however, with just about the same general list of them.

First we receive sobriety, which is the chance to go on living. We try to bring that chance to others and watch them come alive. We slowly discover that our lives have a purpose because God has a plan for us; a plan that we grow little by little toward His likeness and image.

Then follows the conviction that we live in a universe filled with His love--a creation that makes sense. As this vision comes clear we can begin to live in harmony with ourselves and with our fellows. We are going someplace; our destiny becomes secure.

Next we begin actually to welcome our growing pains. Suffering is no longer a menace to be evaded at any cost. When it does come, no matter how grievously, we realize that it too has its purpose. It is our great teacher because it reveals our defects and so pushes us forward into the paths of progress. The pain of drinking did just this for us. And so can any other pain.

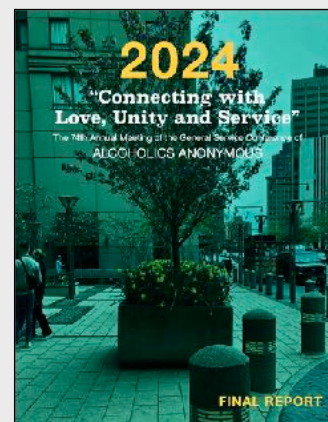
Our Twelve Traditions are a prime example of what pain has done for us since we sobered up. Every single AA Tradition was evolved from the immense growing pains of AA's early years; each rests securely upon this foundation. For this reason only, we now have our Twelve Traditional principles that can spell unity, brotherhood and service for all time to come.

What people in this very troubled world of 1958 could possibly have more reasons to be grateful at Thanksgiving than we of Alcoholics Anonymous!

**Reprinted with permission AA Grapevine November 1958**

The full and final report of the 2024 General Service Conference is available on A.A.'s website.

[2024 General Service  
Conference Final Report](#)





# AA HISTORY

N A P G O F S B Y R V Y K M A L A D Y Y G T D X  
 E C I V R E S C E E H O A P T B L I P S F G G O  
 I H K H K P C V S Y H X O U W I A Q Z I L R S R  
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 F K T B I G B O O K R V I H A T C M X E V U Y A  
 L L G N I L R E B I E S A T T E I R N E H O W B

- |                      |                    |                    |                   |                   |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Henrietta Seiberling | St Thomas hospital | The man on the bed | One day at a time | Twelve traditions |
| Doctor silkworth     | Mayflower hotel    | Primary purpose    | Serenity prayer   | Ardmore avenue    |
| Four absolutes       | Keep it simple     | Sister Ignatia     | Unselfishness     | Founders day      |
| Higher power         | How it works       | Oxford group       | Twelve steps      | AA preamble       |
| Bill Wilson          | Lois Wilson        | Akron Ohio         | Alcoholics        | Anne smith        |
| Doctor bob           | Fellowship         | Anonymity          | Grapevine         | Powerless         |
| Big book             | Recovery           | Sobriety           | Honesty           | Service           |
| Malady               | Purity             | Unity              | Love              |                   |