

Delegate Report

65th General Service Conference
Crown Plaza Hotel
New York City, New York
April 19 - 25, 2015

Greetings,

Our A.A. Service Manual (S58) describes in part an area delegate's responsibility for reporting to the area committee and the groups back home. This is my attempt to relay to you those parts of the Conference that left an impression on me, highlights if you will. The theme of the 65th General Service Conference was Celebrating 80 years of Recovery, Unity and Service. There were #133 voting members of this year's Conference; 93 delegates; 25 A.A.W.S. and A.A. Grapevine directors; 15 staff members from the General Service Office and Grapevine. A detailed Conference report of the 65th General Service Conference will be published and available for reading later this summer. I purposely did not scribe minute-by-minute nor even hour-by-hour notes of the many hours which comprise the Conference. I did, however, rampantly plagiarize many of my fellow delegates who have kindly shared their reports with me.

My wife of fifty plus years graciously agreed to travel with me for the 2015 Conference, I am grateful that she did. We arrived at LaGuardia airport before noon on Saturday, April 18th. A cab ride had us arriving at the Conference hotel just after the lunch hour. Upon registering at the hotel we were informed our room would not be ready until "after three."

In the hotel lobby I approached a man with what appeared to me to be a Conference badge. I introduced myself, and he, in turn, invited us to a hospitality suite that was just being opened up. The suite was a meet 'n greet event for trustees, staff, and delegates; there were ample opportunity for introductions and conversation. I seated myself at a table next to a man on who's badge was written "Leonard." He was extremely good natured and willingly conversant.

I later found out I was speaking to a class A (non-alcoholic) trustee emeriti Leonard Blumenthal who had been a trustee in 2000 and later became chairman of the General Service Board in 2005. He said "this is my 15th Conference." What exceptional people we have toiling on our behalf!

Later, on Saturday, the conferees met in the room where the business of A.A. would be conducted over the next six days. That first (unofficial) meeting is known as a "1728 Meeting," The meeting provided further opportunity for the G.S.O. staff, delegates, guests and trustees to get to know each other. The 1728 speakers addressed the Second Step, Second Tradition and Concept Two. The 1728 meeting was followed by a meeting regarding "Loners and Internationalists/Remote Communities." That meeting was, at times, quite moving and meaningful. A.A. spans the globe. The evening concluded with a delegate's only meeting arranged to prepare us "newcomers" for the week that lie ahead. The ended about 10:00 p.m. The Conference had not, as yet, officially even begun!

Sunday, is the first "official" day of the Conference each year. The day began with registration at 9:00 a.m.. At 10:00 a.m. sharp Terry Bedient class A trustee introduced himself. Terry is chairman of the General Service Board and, as such, serves as chair of the Conference. Terry gave opening remarks and soon after there was a roll-call, greetings from various panel 64 delegates and the keynote address by trustee J. Gary L. Bob W. trustee-at-large U.S.A. spoke about the recently concluded 23rd World service meeting in Warsaw, Poland. It was there, in Poland, that four new countries were admitted: Czechoslovakia, Hong Kong, Romania and Iran. In Iran A.A.'s are required to meet outdoors and must, by law, refer to themselves as *Nameless Sobers* and not as Alcoholics Anonymous. Bob, and others, also traveled to Russia. There are currently two Russian G.S.O.s both who's licenses are about to expire. The dual Russian offices are attempting to consolidate. A new G.S.O. license will not be issued until there is but one G.S.O. office in Russia; hopefully yet this month.

Rick W. from G.S.O. staff gave us a description of A.A. around the globe. There are currently #62 G.S.O.'s worldwide. Impressive what we do as a Fellowship to help and assist all who have a desire to stop drinking. There are no boundaries, or no place on earth, this Fellowship will not lend a helping hand.

Lunch was by region. Our East Central Region has fourteen delegates and our regional trustee. After lunch we returned to the Conference room for a myriad of presentations and open discussions. Mid afternoon we had our first Conference Committee meeting where each Conference committee met the trustee who serves on a particular committee. I served on the Grapevine Committee with seven other delegates. We met with the chair of the Grapevine board Andrew W. a class B trustee for a relaxed discussion of current affairs involving the Grapevine corporation. Officially the board is known as the Grapevine board in that La Viña came along some fifty years after Grapevine was first published.

Sunday evening there was Opening Dinner and A.A. Meeting for Conference members and their spouses, significant others. We heard from G.S.O. staff member Steve S., and Sally W. the panel 64 delegate from Wyoming, Luc T. delegate from Northwest Quebec, Phyllis H. the soon retiring General manager of the General Service Office. Last to speak Sunday was Chet P. Southeast Regional trustee. The first day of the Conference concluded about 11:00 p.m. Now this was the second day in a row I was unable to take my customary afternoon "nappy."

Monday the Conference shifted into high gear. Each day I attended the 7:00 a.m. Serenity meetings. It was a choice we all had, breakfast or an A.A. meeting? I chose to have my feet on the floor each day by 05:30 a.m. and attend the morning meeting. Monday Conference Committee meetings began each weekday at 09:00 a.m. The committees met each day except Friday at 9:00 a.m. and some continued to meet throughout the week before and after other scheduled events. The Grapevine committee agenda was non controversial and very straightforward. We spent the morning committee meeting "reviewing" strategies, business plans and the revised text for the A.A. pamphlet "A.A. Grapevine and La Viña: Our Meetings In Print."

Monday afternoon the Conference welcomed three new trustees. Officially thanked G.S.O. staff members who had, or who are, retiring. The Board chair gave his report on the General Service Board and a copy of the #15 new "Board Initiatives" are also on the display table. Next we listened to a report on A.A. World Services from A.A.W.S. board chair, class B trustee Billy N.

- The G.S.O. website has +30,000 visitors each day.
- Currently 54% of total literature sales are "on-line."
- Presently there are 68 language translations of the Big Book w/13 new translations in the works.
- 53 sovereign nations are licensed to print and distribute 1,710 publications.
- A.A.W.S. publishes literature in 87 languages.

—The 75th Anniversary Commemorative Big Book —

- 177,888 copies were sold in the first half of 2014.
- The books were "flying off the shelves" at a rate of 4,800+ / week. Nearly 90% were sold.
- A re-order was made in early Summer 2014.
- Upon the arrival of the second printing (re-order) sales dropped to near zero.
- So far in 1st quarter 2015 3,800 books have sold.
- Generally accepted accounting practices required A.A. to examine the year-end inventory of 165,000 printed books.
- It was determined that 125,000 completed books required a write-down. Leaving 40,000 completed books in inventory as of December 31, 2014.
- To date, the Net Profit on the Anniversary Big Book is at \$161,696.
- We can expect these anniversary Big Books will be available for purchase at the upcoming international convention July 2-5 in Atlanta.

Speaking next was A.A. Grapevine Board chair, Andrew W. reported on the Grapevine. Andrew explained the Grapevine Board has had eight directors since the 64th Conference. Two general Service trustees, two Regional trustees, three non-trustee directors and the executive editor/publisher. Out of the million plus A.A.

members in North America Grapevine had a 2014 print circulation of ±74,000. 3,126 less subscribers than in 2013. Online grapevine subscribers number 5,262 in 2014. La Viña had a bimonthly circulation of 10,379 subscribers per issue. Gross profit was ahead of budget by \$2,180 and production overhead costs were under budget by \$4,935 dollars.

There is an ongoing "Subscription Challenge" for Grapevine/La Viña for each state, province, and territory. Every member of the Fellowship, every G.S.R. and D.C.M. is encouraged to have a personal subscription, as well as, encourage their groups to have subscriptions as well. La Viña will celebrate 20 years in 2016.

Next speaker was David M. chairman of the Trustees' Finance & Budgetary Committee gave an excellent comprehensive and power point report on the financials. A copy of that power point is available for your review on the Conference display table.

We heard a report from Barb K., trustee-at-large/Canada and afterward we broke for dinner.

After dinner we began the first of three scheduled general sharing sessions. It was here, at this point in time, I first became aware of who, among my compatriots, had a seeming irresistible affinity for the floor microphones at every opportunity they were afforded without exception.

Next came the portion of each day's agenda referred to as "Area Highlights," wherein each first year delegate gives a timed :03 minute report of what is going on in their area. The regional trustee for each region introduces the speakers. These highlights, given each day over the course of the week, seemed to me, to unnecessarily consume a great deal of time. Given that remembering each speaker's area highlights was, for this alcoholic, an impossible task.

Tuesday is "casual dress" day. After the Serenity meeting the committees met until noon. My committee, Grapevine finished its' agenda by lunch time. We elected next year's committee chair, a delegate from Western Missouri, and our alternate committee chair from Central Northern California. Tuesday afternoon, we heard a few more area highlights then it was off to our General Service Office via subway from 49th street to 116th street and 475 Riverside Drive and the Interchurch Center where A.A. currently occupies portions of the 10th and 11th floors. Plans are well underway to consolidate the Grapevine offices to the 11th floor by year's end to be completed in early 2016.

The GSO tour was enlightening. In years gone by I had previously driven by the Interchurch Building but had not stopped to visit. If you, in your travels, have an opportunity to visit our General Service Office don't miss the opportunity. The staff of but eighty-one souls serves our 114,000 groups and 1,300,000 North American members in a workplace comprised of one floor (the 11th floor) in less than spacious surroundings. Enjoy archives, your time will be well spent. Your "welcome home" greeting at the reception desk is memorable. We then returned to the Crown Plaza for a delegates dinner followed by a delegates only meeting. It became my opportunity to share our area 32 highlights that evening. I underwhelmed all who were present. Tuesday's activities were concluded at a point after 9:30 p.m.

Wednesday morning we met separately in fifteen separate inventory groups with each group addressing five questions each. This 65th Conference concluded three years (first time ever) of inventory of the Fellowship and the process of conducting the business of A.A.. A full report will be forthcoming later this year. Before lunch we heard the remaining area highlights. Wednesday our lunch was, once again, by region in separate rooms.

After lunch we entered the Conference floor to find an area "roped off." There were elections for the Northeast Region, Southwest Region and Canada's trustee-at-large. The process was informative.

The committee reports to the Conference followed. Dinner was at 6:00 p.m. After dinner more committee reports, the second general sharing session and closing remarks at about 10:15 p.m.

Note: Each day there were Conference evaluation forms to be filled out and turned in-progress not perfection.

Thursday was the last day we had our morning Serenity meeting. The business day began right after 8:00 a.m. with some committees meeting late into the previous night and early this day. Upon entering the Conference we were handed electronic voting devices to drape around our necks on lanyards. This was to be the first time the Conference would use the methodology of electronic voting as opposed to the customary "show of hands" way of voting. All in all, electronic voting is way faster, easier and very accurate. We only used the devices Thursday afternoon and they were not used again for the remainder of the Conference. The 2016 Conference will again use the electronic voting devices on Friday only. A final decision on adopting electronic voting will be made at the 67th General Service Conference in 2017. More committee reports and discussion and voting. Late into Thursday evening there was a 2015 International Convention report which concluded after 10:30 p.m. The scheduled third and last General Sharing Session was deferred to Friday where ultimately it was eliminated altogether due to time constraints.

Friday the Conference began *late* at 08:30 a.m. The balance of the committee reports were presented, discussed, and voted upon Friday morning and again after lunch. Briefly, in the a.m. there was a brief synopsis of the three year inventory. A bound report of the inventory will be available later this year. On Friday afternoon the less than a dozen floor actions were presented and dealt with. At the very end of the last day the panel 64 delegates rotating out lined up and said their farewells. Some were rather stoic, some were exceptionally brief, others were poignant and emotional. The panel 64 delegates gathered at the back of the Conference room and led by my Conference buddy John from New Brunswick, Canada with his harmonica they sang in unison a very creative goodbye to the rest of us.

I missed the farewell breakfast for outgoing trustees held on Saturday morning. I had booked our flights early in January and, at that time, I was unaware of the Saturday a.m. functions.

My Impressions:

If this year's Conference is indicative of Conferences in general, then the word INTENSE comes to mind. I read my committee agenda items several times between mid January and April 19th. I made a few calls to garner additional information. Those efforts however, did not keep me from feeling I) unprepared and II) What am I doing here?

I was somewhat relieved to hear several other first year delegates express similar emotions. We were told our second year would be better.

We, the Fellowship, are in good hands with the number of skilled, knowledgeable and motivated young people who are in service to us all.

Alcoholics Anonymous is not on the precipice, but we do have a problem that is no longer subtle, no longer can be overlooked, must be addressed in the near term. Our individual and group support of the General Service Office is now and has been declining. Our yearly support expenses both overall and per member continues to grow while, at the same time, our individual and group support is measurably declining as is income from print sales. Ask your groups to consider sending 7th Tradition proceeds to our General Service Office regularly.

The goings on of the business of A.A. is transparent

TRENDS

- Membership levels are flat
- Contribution levels are flat
- Literature sales show slow to no growth
- Expenses continue to grow slowly +2-3% per year
- Grapevine subscriptions continue to diminish while production expenses continue to grow

Delegate Statistics

<u>Age</u>	<u>Sobriety</u>	<u>Service</u>
Average....57 years	Average....22 years	Average...18 years
Oldest.....78	Longest.....42	Longest...37
Youngest...32	Shortest.....8	Shortest....5

Grapevine Committee Considerations:

- *La Vina* is being published as cost effectively as possible.
- Implement a communication plan to the fellowship clarifying *La Vina's* unique status as a service that strives to be self-supporting.
- Encouraged ***purchase of Subscription Gift Certificates*** by local service committees, groups and members to provide magazines to people in prison, treatment centers and nursing homes.
- Suggested that the AA Grapevine board produce two books:
 - Armed Forces Members' AA Stories (working title)
 - Voices from Early AA (working title)

—TRUST THE PROCESS—

I. There were at least two exceptionally lengthy debates that were far too long. The same people were voicing their opinions over and over. One debate centered around micro managing an already previously settled issue about timely translation of A.A. material from English to both Spanish and French. That debate was 4:00+ hours one day that carried over to the next day for an additional three hours. The issue being allowed to be debated had been voted upon previously and "settled." Nevertheless we reconsidered a previously reconsidered item twice.

II. The direction we heard all week was "trust the process." Yet, some had difficulty with that concept. Another debated issue was creating even more A.A. pamphlets for the literature racks. I voted "no" on the creation of additional pamphlets even in light of the arguments I heard on how worthy they might be. We, the Fellowship, in my opinion, are slowly but surely playing into the egos of the still sick and suffering who seek sobriety. We cater to what makes them different, what makes them special, what differentiates them from being common, run of the mill, drunks. When all is said and done it matters little whether we are young or old, black or white, gay or straight, dual addicted or not, male or female, and so on. Or problem has been and is or thinking, we're not unique, we are, when all is said and done, simply recovered drunks who need each other.

III. The proposal to incorporate the Big Book, with the Twelve & Twelve, with the A.A. Concepts for World Service into one bound book was defeated. I was a part of the vote to defeat that proposal.

I thank you all for providing me the opportunity to represent Central Michigan Intra Area. It is an honor and a privilege to be your panel 65 delegate. Thank you.

In His service,

Kirk F., delegate
Central Michigan Intra Area