

58th General Service Conference Report

Before I begin to tell you all of the details about what happened at the Conference, I want to tell you that we are indeed a self correcting society. I have now attended two Conferences and have been told at the end of both "That was unprecedented" and "that has never happened before". And after attending last years Conference, I came back with many mixed emotions and it was a rather rough experience. I feel like my eyes were opened about AA and that in a way it was "Delegate Comes of Age" and I love AA even more and understand it better, at every level, and I truly believe it is all "just us". I now know beyond a shadow of a doubt that no matter what how long you may have served Alcoholics Anonymous, you can and will still learn new things about it. I know that even if one has been in service for a very long time, they can still be subject to their mis guided passion and react in emotional ways rather than giving things the careful consideration that we are taught here. But most of all I know that AA as a whole is stronger than any one of us and that mistakes made are generally made by people who are absolutely passionate about AA. At our Saturday night Delegates only meeting before the Conference began, Al the Delegate from Rhode Island told us a story about how some personality conflicts between different service entities had recently been resolved by " the drunks just getting together and locking themselves in a room till their differences were resolved." Little did we know how much that story would mean by the end of the week! In my opinion, last year there had been some seeds of mistrust sown and that created some misunderstandings that seemed to carry throughout the year. Even before getting to the Conference this year, I had received some emails from other Delegates that let me know that all wounds had not been healed. I sensed a real "us" and "them" mentality with mistrust aimed towards the AAWS Board and the Trustees. This was a very strange atmosphere and I went to New York hoping that we could all put things aside and do our best for AA as a whole. Well, I often don't know what is best for AA as a whole, it seems because just like every other part of AA, we need to talk about things that are bothering us and get them resolved. We proceeded to do our work and have very long hours thru the week. Then we came to Friday, the final day of working at the Conference. Usually the work part is scheduled to end about 3:00 p.m. when the outgoing Delegates say their goodbyes, the Chairman of the Board gives a closing message and we all leave bout 5::00pm and the work is finished. Well, this year was

surely different. By Friday, we still had many committee reports and we had an amazing FIFTEEN FLOOR ACTIONS to hear and deal with. Floor actions are discouraged and are often used to re-visit or bring up something that a committee had taken no action on. I believe the reason there were so many floor actions actually grew from the still festering mistrust and miscommunication. Well, the theme of this Conference was "Communication&Participation" and by Friday afternoon, the real communicating began and as the real problems began to surface and be discussed fully, I was able to witness the true spiritual power that is found in Alcoholics Anonymous. And this would not be an easy, "let's get it over with" discussion. Instead, we all stayed and worked all through Friday and finally finished the Conference about 1:00am Saturday. I think that all in attendance would agree that all concerns were aired and fully discussed, that everyone there was "just us", all working for the best for AA. It was amazing at one point when Greg M., our General Service Manager, told us that although we only had the hotel meeting area until 10:00pm, that the hotel would allow us to stay until finished and the entire room erupted in applause and cheers. No one wanted to leave, we knew this had to be done and everyone was more than willing to work until they felt things had been set as right as they could be.

And Al's story about a bunch of drunks locking themselves in a room until all things were resolved surely described this Conference for me!

So now I will go back to the beginning. I arrived in New York about 9:30pm Thursday April 24, 2008. Arriving at the hotel I found that they were in the middle of what they call a "re-invention" or a major remodel. This will actually affect future Conferences as our AAWS Board will be looking into new meeting places after the 2009 Conference. Anyway after getting unpacked, I went out to get a Starbucks and ran into Gail, Area 08 San Diego/Imperial Delegate and her husband Larry, a Past Delegate and Trustee. We had dinner around the corner and talked about the upcoming schedules. The next morning I attended the regular AA meeting held at our General Service meeting at 11:00 a.m. When it is Conference week, this meeting is held downstairs in a larger room. It is a great way to start the Conference experience and then many of us had lunch in the Cafeteria and visited our office. On Saturday morning the Pacific Regional Delegates together with some Delegates from other Regions and some past Trustees took a bus trip to some historical AA sites with narration provided by past General Service Officer Manager George D and our current Archivist Amy. We drove by one of the first Grapevine offices, the Bowery and then made a

stop at 182 Clinton Street and 38 Livingston Street, places where Bill and Lois had lived. You can see some of these photos on the display board. We also went by the Calvary Church and Mission Park where Bill attended Oxford Group meeting and got sober. We ended by going by Towns Hospital which is no longer a hospital and was surrounded by scaffolding and undergoing some repair work. Then we returned to the hotel to prepare for the Delegates Only meeting. This years Delegate Chair was France from Quebec. Last year when she was chosen Delegate Chair, France spoke only French. It was very moving to have her greet us in English and it set the tone for a great meeting as the new Delegates were greeted by the second year Delegates.

On Sunday, we had the "un official meeting before the Conference"- The Remote Communities meeting. You can view the newsletter and reports about Remote Communities from different Areas, in one of the notebooks that I have provided. This meeting shares experience, strength and hope about working with communities that are hard to reach due to geography, language and/or culture.

Then Sunday at 11:45 we had our Regional Lunches for orientation by region and then opening session began at 1:15pm. It thrilled me again when roll call was taken and I answered "present" as Delegate from Area 93! We then broke into meetings with our Committees and the corresponding Trustee Committees; we ended the day with the opening dinner and speaker meeting.

As I give my report, I will also be making suggestions for some of our area Committees and District committees to take immediate action on so listen for these ideas!

Beginning **Monday** we started working in our committees and later in the day heard Area Highlights from first year Delegates and Board reports from AAWS, General Service Board and the Grapevine Board. These full reports are available in the folder that I have provided. I will give you some highlights from each report beginning with the General Service Board report given by Leonard Blumenthal, Class A Trustee and Chairman of the Board. Leonard gave us information about the search for a new General Service Office Manager to replace Greg M who will retire at the end of this year. A search committee consisting of Trustees Ward E. , John K, Paul C and Jo-Anne L , Madeleine P and John S has been formed. Leonard also gave us

an update on the AdHoc Committee on the Board Inventory. There have been some items forwarded to committees and a summary of the discussions regarding the inventory will be forwarded to the 2009 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions. Leonard was also a speaker at the 50th International Council on Alcoholism and Addictions Conference in Sweden. This Conference brings together many professionals from many discipline, - researchers, clinicians, policy makers, educators. There were 340 attendees from 46 countries. He noticed that AA is still an enigma and he used the opportunity through presentations and personal contacts to emphasize how AA can be a resource and our continued willingness to cooperate with the professionals community by providing information about Alcoholics Anonymous. Remember, Leonard is a non alcoholic, his is a volunteer position and in his professional life he continues to be active in the field of alcoholism as a speaker, consultant and resource person. And he spent 131 nights in hotels for AA business in the last year! Pretty amazing volunteer! In October the World Service meeting will be held in New York. This meeting can occur anywhere in the world and this time it will be in New York. Many members confuse this meeting with the General Service Conference. But the World Service Meeting is actually attended by Delegates from many countries. The theme is " Service: Gratitude in Action".

Then we heard from Howard L., Chairperson of A.A.W.S., who began by telling us that our General Service Office (GSO) welcomed 1,477 visitors in 2007. A total of 941 new AA groups listed with GSO last year. The current target for new GSRs or group contacts to receive their basic information package is 21 days from entering the information into the system. So, if there is a delay in receiving your new packages, please first check with your Area Registrar to make sure the information has been forwarded to GSO. The Registrar or you would then go ahead and let GSO know if your group or GSR has not received their new package within that time frame.

Since last years Conference, AAWS directors and GSO staff have participated in five Regional Forums, the Annual Intergroup Seminar in Oklahoma and two Native American Gatherings in Washington and Montana. the 49th International Conference of Young People in AA in Los Angeles, Ca. . In addition, International Trustees and GSO Staff accepted invitations from AA in other countries to share experience with AA groups and trusted servants: Doug R and Greg M attended the 3rd Sub-Saharan Africa Service Meeting in Namibia. This meeting was attended by 22 Delegates representing 11 countries. Doug and Greg also visited Nairobi,

Kenya where they met with volunteers in the intergroup office, professionals in the Ministry of Health and AA groups in prison.

Dorothy W. and Julio E attended the 20th anniversary of AA in Russia , a gathering that drew over 2,000 participants. On the way to Russia they both visited with members of Helsinki and Finland service structures. There were also visits by Trustees or Staff to Mongolia, Brazil, Germany, Malta, Oman, France. Our Trustee at Large, Dorothy W participated in a Concepts Workshop with members of the Polish General Service Board and Service Structure. Greg M joined her there on his way back from the Central Africa Meeting in Paris. Jo Anne L participated in the 2nd National Convention of AA in Cuba in LaHavana. Julio E participated in the 19th Convention of AA in Ukraine and the 33rd AA Convention of Central America held in San Jose, Costa Rica.

Our Publications Department was also busy this year with the production of the Third Edition of the Spanish Language Big Book. Also the total distributions of all books were up this year. Our publications director also presented a schedule of the conversion of existing audio/video publications to CD or DVD and anticipates that everything will be converted by April 2008.

Once I heard this part I immediately made a note to myself to contact our Area Chairman, Jeff, as soon as I returned home about updating all our equipment for taping our business meetings and for our audio visual committee since we are now very much out of date. So Jeff has started that investigation already and you will probably hear more about it at our next assembly.

Also from publications we learned the Big Book was translated into Hebrew, Amharic (for Ethiopia) and in Greek. Also pamphlets were translated in Tahitian, Kazakh, Inuit, Khmer and Croatian.

Our Archive Department has been utilizing new Laserfiche software in their efforts to preserve and utilize the thousands of documents stored in GSO Archives. Among many other projects they are currently scanning all General Service Board Minutes from 1938 to present and creating a full inventory of the many recordings and oral histories recorded by Bill in 1954 as he was preparing to write AA Comes of Age.

At the end of 2007, GSO had 81 full time employees and one part time student.

Then Ray M, Chairperson of AA Grapevine gave his report. He let us know that Grapevine subscriptions increased by 2, 221 last year. And this was cause for celebration. But after his report, I questioned this figure.

Remember we had the Grapevine Challenge last year for each of the 93 Areas to get 100 new subscriptions? That figure is closed to 23 per Area. So at our request we are going to renew the Grapevine Challenge and see if we can reach the 100 from each Area by the end of this year! I really believe that it takes more than six months or a year to get the word out to the members. So let's do it AGAIN!!

Grapevine has seen an increase in sales of the books they produce also. LaVina circulation increased by 7.4%. In 2006 , LaVina growth was 11% and in 2007 it was 7.4%. For both Grapevine and LaVina committees at Area level, I would ask that you come up with some solid plans for increasing circulation of the magazines and also that you consider having a committee meeting focused on writing stories for the magazines. You might also consider having District "Grapefests" or days centered around the magazines where you hold workshops about writing for the magazine and let the local membership know about the many products that Grapevine and LaVina have to offer. Rogelio, one of our Class A Trustees also suggested putting the magazines in Public Defenders offices. He recently had given the magazine to "offenders" and had them read it and write an essay on the article that touched their heart. One such client wrote him essays on many of the articles. One more idea from the Conference is to include an issue of the magazine in newcomer packages at the group level. **(TELL ROGELIO STORY- from "you" to "we")**

FINANCE REPORT: Our Treasurer, Vince Keefe, rotated out at the end of this Conference. He has really made things very simple for us when reporting back to all of you and he will be missed. Contributions were 7.6% higher in 2007 than in 2006. And if each member in 2008 were to contribute \$6.88 per year or each group \$154.92, we will be self supporting through our own voluntary contributions.

Tuesday we continued working in committees, visited GSO and Grapevine offices then met at night for another Delegates only meeting. At this meeting the next Delegate Chairperson for the 2009 Conference is chosen. Each region puts the names of the first year Delegates into a hat and selects a name. Last year I came out of the hat for the Pacific Region so this year I got to pull the name from the hat. I pulled out Joe B's name, the Delegate from Area 9 Mid Southern California. Then all the Regions put the selected names into another hat and Joe was selected as the Delegate Chairperson for the 59th General Service Conference. Many of us went out that night for ice cream to celebrate!

Then **Wednesday** began with all of us in Workshops regarding the topic "Love and Tolerance, Now More than Ever" It was my privilege to serve as a Workshop Moderator this year. The summaries of these workshops will be published in the Final Conference Reports.

We then attended our Regional luncheons which are definitely working lunches. I submitted our bid for the Pacific Regional Forum in 2011 and I am happy to say that we will indeed be hosting the Pacific Region in 2011 at the Warner Marriott Center in Woodland Hills where PRAASA 2006 was held. Rick W from GSO is working with the hotel already. We had some conflicts with dates and I will have to ask our Area to reschedule our August 2011 Area Assembly. We have done this in the past and with two and one half years notice, I hope it will not be a problem. I will let you know once I have more details. Also PRAASA 2012 will be held in Bellevue, Washington, hosted by Area 72. This was their fifth bid for PRAASA and the last time they hosted was in 1995.

We then all returned to the Conference sessions where elections for the West Central Regional Trustee and the Western Canada Regional trustee were held. Both elections were determined by "the hat". Ken B is our new West Central Regional Trustee and Vic P. is the new Western Canada Regional Trustee. Vic is a good friend of our Past Delegate Vicki and I had to force myself to wait the requested two hour time period for Vic to be notified by his Delegate before I texted the great news to Vicki!

Wednesday evening at 7:45 We began to hear committee reports. The first committee was **Corrections**. They recommended that a copy of the annual Grapevine and LaVinas that are produced without staples be included in the Corrections Kit and Workbook together with the DVD "AA in Correctional Facilities. They also have suggested to the Trustees Committee on corrections that consideration be given to the development of a CD which contains the contents of "Corrections AA Group Handbook . Next we had a report from the **Finance Committee** and at our Assembly that report will be given by Gail N. the Delegate from Area 08, San Diego, Imperial, who served on the Finance Committee. **(For reports at District level- "The committee recommended in an advisory action that the Trustees determine a way to gather input from the Fellowship regarding fully funding GSO services by voluntary contributions only and not using book sales. The Committee also suggested that consideration be given to developing a finance kit that would included updated Self Support packet (FV-19) to include Finance Guidelines (MG-15), adding the information that is contained in the Self Support Packet to the GSOs**

AA website , that the Self Support Kite be sent to incoming Area Treasurers and also added to the Conference Approved Literature Catalog. If you are not aware of this packet, please order one immediately from GSO, it is invaluable.) Then the **Agenda Committee** report was given and this is the committee that I have served on for the last two years. It was an amazing experience to see the Conference workshops and banner with the theme that we had suggested the last year and to hear Delegates talk about how perfect that Theme had turned out to be. The Theme for the 59th General Service Conference is : "Our Commitment to Carry A.A.'s Message- Enthusiasm and Gratitude in Action". I have prepared separate sheets for all of you with the Theme, presentations and workshop topic. This is the time to start talking about these ideas and to use them as group discussion topics. I also like to think that it is also a great tool to encourage people to think about what they would like to submit as a Theme and presentation ideas for the 60th General Service Conference. Those ideas need to be submitted by the end of the year.

Thursday morning we continued with committee reports and the first committee was **Conference Committee on Trustees**. They had actually met four times rather than the regular two times as a committee. They recommended some changes to the language regarding the Nominating Procedure No. 9, the process of hiring our General Manager, approved by the General Service Board on February 9, 2008. There was lengthy discussion, voting, minority opinion, re-voting, and finally the motion failed. The Conference decided that the language that the Board had come up with after much research and legal advice will remain. If you would like to see this exact language, please let me know and I can either show you in my work book or I can email it to you. The motion to reconsider the 2007 Conference Advisory Action to consider Class A and Class B Trustees for Chairman of the Board was discussed by the committee and they took no action. There were two floor actions brought forth regarding this topic that would be heard at the end of the Conference. This topic has not been laid to rest but for the selection of our next Chairman of the Board which occurs in 2009, all Class A and Class B Trustees will be considered.

Then we heard the report from the **Cooperation with the Professional Community**. They recommended that the video segments directed to professionals in the legal/criminal justice and health service fields be streamed on GSO's website with the suggested minor changes. Hopefully this will be available on the website by Fall 2008. They also suggested to the Publications department that the video segments directed to professionals in the employment/human relations field have some changes and a revised

draft be brought to the 2009 Conference Committee for review. When all the video segments are complete they will be packaged and sent in the CPC kits.

We then heard from **Public Information**. This was the committee that we spent so much time on and it seems that each Conference has a committee that generates lengthy discussion! The committee had a lot of work this year and they actually met three times before giving their report. They recommended that the new television public service announcement, "I Thought" be approved and that tracking continues with this PSA. The Conference as a whole asked that the ending on "PSAs" refer not only to contacting us by website or phone but also by newspapers since there are some areas with large populations (such as First Nations in Canada) that do not have phones or computers but ads do appear in local newspapers. They also recommended that the 2002-2006 Conference Advisory Actions regarding replacement and production of television public service announcements be reconsidered and that the need for a new one be considered each year and that ones in circulation only be retired when no longer relevant and/or useful. There will not be a new PSA produced to review by the 2009 Conference. Next we discussed the consideration to update the script and recording of Radio PSAs and it was recommended that they be updated and brought back to the 2009 Conference Committee. So I would like to ask our **Area Public Information Committee** to obtain copies of these Radio PSAs and copies of the written script from Irene, the staff member on the Public Information desk and review these and submit suggestions for changes by the end of December. This can also be a project at District level but I really hope our PI Committee will take this on and complete it before the end of the year. Another project that I would like to suggest is an idea that came from the Delegate opinion polls. Most members of Area 93 are not aware of the AA Videos for Young People project and I think it is because not enough of us have fully understood what it involves. Basically, it give us, the members of AA, the chance to upload videos we create, aimed at Young People, that will be streamed on our website and also made into a CD to be shown at high schools and colleges. By members continually submitting video ideas, the CD and website stream can be constantly updated. So this is the opportunity to directly participate in what is shown at our schools and on our website. Although the Guidelines were handed out last year, I would like the Public Information Committee to come up with a flyer to be used throughout our Area explaining the Project. This is a direct request from our members through the opinion polls.

The 2007 Membership survey was then reviewed and after much discussion was recommended to be published and distributed. You should be seeing these in a few months. I have a draft in my workbook if anyone would like to see it, let me know.

Then we began a very long discussion on the proposed text for a section on posthumous anonymity to be included in the pamphlet "Understanding Anonymity". The recommended language was not adopted and it is back to the drawing board but one thing that truly came from this discussion was that we as AA members should advise our family members how we would like to this to be handled when we pass away. But the final decision always rest with the members family and as AA members we really cannot be telling family members what to do or interfering in anyway with decisions they make.

The next topic was the recommendation that a wall poster for young people with information about Alcoholics Anonymous be developed and brought back to the 2009 Conference. After a two hour discussion, this recommendation did pass. Also in the committee's additional considerations, they asked that new AA Guidelines on the Internet be included in the Public Information Kit. I have a copy of these guidelines that you can review in one of the notebooks that I have provided for you to look through. This committee report and discussion took up most of the day Thursday and continued Friday morning. Which meant on our last day, Friday, we still had about seven committees to hear from and a growing number of Floor Actions. How could we possibly finish by the afternoon? Well, obviously we could not!

The **Literature Committee** reviewed the progress on the revision of the "The A.A. Member- Medications and other Drugs and a draft pamphlet should be available for review at next year's Conference.

Report and Charter Committee recommended that new language regarding a District Information Change Form be added to the Service Manual. They also recommended that The Online Intergroup of A.A. be listed in a new section title "Online Intergroups" in the A.A. Directories. They further recommended that the language saying that information in the directory is confidential and not to be used to solicit, be in more noticeable print. This was approved and then rescinded by floor action. The reason for that is that we do not want to have a Conference Advisory Action telling publications what to do and that it should have been what is called an "additional consideration". So the idea still stands it is just a matter of how it is handled.

The International Conventions/Regional Forums committee noted that the four cities being considered for our 2020 International Convention are: Los Angeles, New Orleans, Vancouver, British Columbia and Detroit.

Policy/Admissions Committee recommended that representatives from other national AA services entities be granted admission as observers to the Conference as they always have been, but that the admission is not to exceed three countries with two representatives per country and that decisions regarding expenses be at the discretion of the General Service Board. Also the responsibility for the General Service Conference site be delegated to the GSO management subject to the approval of the Board. The committee considered the request to establish the Conference Archives Committee as a standing Conference Committee and took no action. This later came up again as a Floor action and this was referred back to the committee process so we will see if it is discussed again next year. It may or may not be.

Treatment Facilities Committee recommended some minor changes to the revised video " Hope: Alcoholics Anonymous " and it will be brought back to the 2009 Conference for review

And that is the summary of the committee work and recommendations.

I have made copies of the summaries of Advisory Actions, Additional Consideration, Floor Actions and Recommendations that did not result in a Floor Action. If you are a DCM, please make copies of these for your District and also please provide copies when I come to give my report at your Districts.

I also want to let you know of some upcoming vacancies effective following the 2009 Conference; AAWS is accepting resumes for two non Trustee Directors and Grapevine also has an opening for a non Trustee Director. Some of the qualifications are a sound business or professional background, leadership qualities and the ability to work within the committee structure, activity in AA service, a minimum of 7 years sobriety. The time requirements are explained with the application and if you are interested in making yourself available for one of these positions, please see me.

Resumes for these positions must be submitted no later than July 1, 2008. There will also be a vacancy for US Trustee at Large. At our November election assembly, anyone interested in this position will be elected by Third Legacy procedure and their resumes must be submitted to the Delegate and to GSO by December. If you plan on making yourself available for US Trustee at Large, please see me for the information package. We are also

looking for a Class A (non-alcoholic) Trustee. Keep this in mind and let me know if you would like more information about those qualifications.

Every other year at Conference end, the Delegates and their guests take buses to visit Stepping Stones, the home of Bill and Lois W, till their deaths. After being in a hotel for the better part of 9 days, it was wonderful to wander the grounds of this peaceful homestead. At one end is the house where they lived and up the hill is Bill's Workshop, called "Wit's End". As I was exploring the grounds, it suddenly dawned on me that this was where the film "Bill's Story" that we see so many times at service events and movie nights - was filmed. One picture on the display board shows me sitting at Bill's desk in Wits end and of course I had to take one sitting at the kitchen table where Ebby first brought the message of recovery to Bill. As I went though the house, I was touched by reading letters that Bill wrote to Lois while he was still drinking. In them he professed his love and made solemn vows to never drink again. And he continued to drink still. It sure sounded familiar. This was a very relaxing, though thought provoking way to end Conference week, basking in our beginnings and seeing one of co-founders as just another alcoholic.

This year besides the display board, I have made up three booklets for you to look through. One booklet has some general information about the Conference and the background information of our Trustees so that you will get to know them better. It also contains the readings that began and ended each Conference day. The second booklet marked GSO contains reports form the GSO staff on their assignment, for instance, if you want to see what Public Information has been doing, there is a short report from Irene. I hope this makes you feel more connected to the people that work for us at GSO. The third booklet marked "Board" contains the Board reports that I told you about earlier but of course there is a lot more detail in the actual report. And by the way, if I am coming to your District or Districts and there are going to be non-alcoholics present, let me know as I will not set up the display board or put these booklets out as they contain last names and of course the display board shows faces.

As I finish up my term as Delegate, I really hope to focus on a few ideas:
1) Share your passion! When you give your reports, let people know how amazing this whole process is. Don't just report the details but connect it to

what we really do- that is- find ways to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

2) Our General Service Office is just that- our office. There is no "them " and "us" . I believe this is vital for you to keep discussing and explaining and it can begin as simply not referring to our office as "New York" but as our office.

3) The AA Grapevine and LaVina are supported by our continued subscriptions. Reach out to your groups to get a Grapevine or LaVina rep to make members aware of our magazines.

But most of all, I want to impress that no one voice is more important or carries more weight than another. Take the responsibility to let the groups know what is going on in AA as a whole, explain how items come to the Conference agenda, take to heart this Conference Theme - "Communication&Participation- the **Key** to Unity and Self- Support".