

Our Primary Purpose

Stories, news and information from our fellowship in the National Capital Region

A member shares:
practicing acceptance
during Covid



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AAs get creative: the
recovery journey put
into verse



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2020 International
Convention – A Virtual
Experience



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Are you all zoomed out?

AAs adapting to the new normal, whatever that is

It might be in the afternoon, the early evening, or a Sunday morning...you can find Shirley H, and four other women, seated six feet apart from each other, on her back deck in Ottawa's downtown Glebe neighbourhood. Let's call it a "Covid-19, Stage 2 – approved" social gathering.

"It's not a big leap from the kitchen table to the backyard," says Shirley, an active member of the women's Attitude of Gratitude, a closed discussion group that, until mid-March, was meeting in the lower level of the Glebe Community Centre.

"Even at our Zoom meetings, it was not hard to see that some of the women were struggling with the isolation imposed by the pandemic. They needed that sense of connection, and intimacy that really only comes from a face to face gathering."

AA grapples with uncertainty

Ottawa Area Intergroup, Area 83, and our local Districts 54, 58, and 62, are all facing similar questions from AA members growing weary of a virtual fellowship.

When are we going to be able to resume meeting face to face? How can we get back a degree of the normality that was taken away when Covid-19, and strict public health guidelines, forced the immediate pivot from church basement to online.

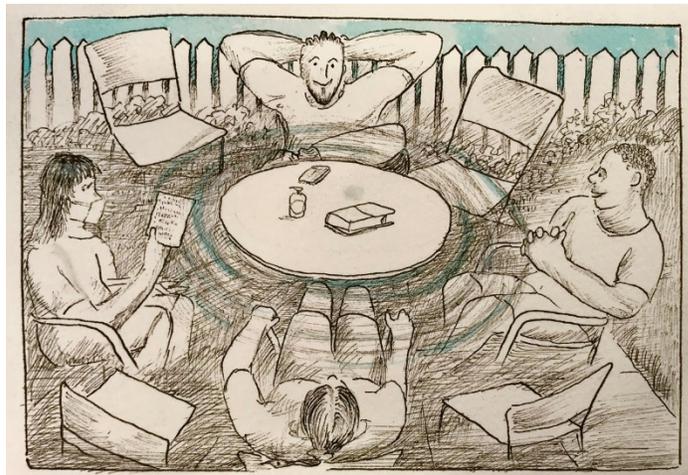


Illustration by Ron M

Committees have been struck, and discussion groups convened. The emerging consensus: we need to be planning for the future, but no one can control the timeline, so let's concentrate on making today better.

"It's not hard to understand people's anxiety and frustration. Nothing truly replaces a face to face meeting. But with so many questions about the timing around future stages of reopening, not to mention the possibility of a second wave, our focus has to be on maximizing today's AA experience, and doing our very best to help the suffering alcoholic," says Harry B, Chair of Ottawa Area Intergroup.

See **What's working, what's not**, Page 8

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Article submission deadline is
the 20th day of the month
preceding publication date

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Editorial – Making today better

Regretting yesterday and fearing tomorrow. We can waste a lot of time brooding about what we could or should have done better yesterday and speculating fearfully about how difficult tomorrow is going to be.

What about today?



What could we be doing to make today the best it can be...for us, and for others? During this protracted time of uncertainty, it's a question we need to grapple with as a fellowship.

Covid-19 has taken away our ability to congregate; it has taken away the life blood of our program...the meeting. We've replaced face-to-face gatherings with a virtual reality, and, in fact, we've made Alcoholics Anonymous even more accessible, for some. But not for everyone.

There are definitely some who feel better served by a Zoom meeting. They can stay in their pajamas, don't have to find a babysitter, don't have to battle traffic, or perhaps deal with a social anxiety.

There are many advantages to being able to simply turn on your computer and join a meeting. But while some are advantaged, many are not. Many are not getting the connection they need, and, as a result, the spiritual nourishment required to stay sober.

Local economic activity may be coming out of pandemic-induced hibernation. Patios may be opening. Families may be flocking to their cottages. On the surface, it can appear as though things are normalizing.

BUT, the grim reality is, we will not be gathering in a church basement, or a community centre any time soon. We are, at best, months away from being able to gather in larger numbers, physical distancing notwithstanding.

And until, or even if, we have a vaccine, some of our immunocompromised fellow AAs may never feel comfortable again stepping into a meeting room with a few dozen other members.

So, in our home groups, and our business meetings, we need to be asking ourselves...what are we doing to make today's AA experience the best it can be.

- What are we doing to reach out to those members who we haven't seen on Zoom?
- What are we doing to keep our home group and our fellowship sustainable?
- What are we doing to help the newcomer feel connected?

We all know how important meetings are. But we also know how important sponsorship, and service are when it comes to helping each other stay sober.

Turning on and off our computers is not enough to keep AA vibrant and meaningful in the way it needs to be, to help the suffering alcoholic.

It really looks like today is going to be with us for quite some time. Let's work together to make today BETTER!

Announcements

Are you looking for Literature and Merchandise? Our Online Pay and Pick-up Service is going Curbside

Visit ottawaaa.org/e-store/ to place orders for literature and merchandise and pay securely by credit card via Stripe. Volunteers will safely prepare your order for pick-up on the dates shown below.

CURBSIDE ONLY PICK-UP will be available between 2:00 and 4:00 PM on Saturday, July 11th and Saturday, July 18th at the SIDE DOOR of the Bronson Centre on the LISGAR STREET SIDE.

Orders for pick-up on July 11th must be placed through the online order form by NOON, July 10th and orders for pick-up on July 18th must be placed by NOON, July 17th.

Please call the office at 613.237.6000 when you arrive. If you don't have a cell phone, call before you come down and let us know what time to expect you.

Alcoholics Anonymous Celebrates 85 Years with the 2020 A.A. Online International Convention

A Unique Virtual Experience, Coming Soon on aa.org

from June 25th Press Release

In a year of firsts for Alcoholics Anonymous, another first is on its way: a virtual International Convention experience, arriving online July 1 at www.aa.org.



“When the global pandemic forced us to cancel our International Convention, the first of which was held in 1950, it became clear that we needed to find a way to celebrate A.A.’s birthday and to honor and acknowledge members in Detroit who labored so hard to prepare for the Convention,” says Julio E., staff member on the International Convention assignment at A.A.’s General Service Office (G.S.O.) in New York City.

The result is the 2020 A.A. Online International Convention, which A.A. members around the world will be able to visit for the entire month of July at aa.org. Clicking on the link will take them to a virtual platform that includes a video welcome from the chair of A.A.’s General Service Board of Trustees; moving stories of individual A.A. members sharing their experience, strength and hope; a “Carry the Message Pavilion” focused on how A.A. members extend the hand of A.A.

around the world; a presentation of the 40 millionth copy of A.A.’s basic text, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, to Dr. George Koob, director of the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA); a nod to the classic convention Flag Ceremony from countries where A.A. has taken root; a look forward to the Vancouver International Convention in 2025; and much more.

CONFESSIONS OF AN ONLINE MEETING HOST

Now that we are well into our third month of social distancing caused by Covid-19, I decided to put down some of my thoughts on what “hosting” AA Zoom meetings is about.

Let's start with basic access, security and conforming to the 3rd Tradition, which states “*The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.*”

- **Basic access** – seems simple if you have the electronic means to access the internet. Most of the online meetings in Ottawa are listed with their Zoom ID at **Ottawaaa.org**. All we need to do is click on the link and voila we can join the meeting.

Well not so fast! Someone has to own that account and “host” those meetings. District 54 is generously providing free access to the district account for groups in the district. However, individual members of each group have taken on hosting their home group meeting. So, what does that mean?

- **Security** – when we first started using Zoom not many groups were willing to use a password but the reality of the nastiness of some Internet users (Zoom Bombers) has unfortunately changed that. There are still those that complain about having to have this kind of security, my opinion on this is **too bad!** It needs to be done. From my knowledge of AA's humble beginnings, it was sponsors that provided security. You had to be sponsored to be given access to meeting locations and accepted by the group. It's up to the Zoom account owner/host to set and maintain passwords. Not hard to do but has significant impact if password changes.

For an open or closed speaker meeting Zooms works well. The host shares the readings, a speaker is introduced and away we go. However, it's when we have closed discussion meetings that break into smaller groups, that's when personalities begin to take shape and muddy the waters.

Breakout Room Challenge #1, How Many Rooms?

The challenge when using breakout rooms is deciding how many to create. If you know how big you want each discussion group to be, you can simply divide that number into your total attendance. And Zoom will do the rest by automatically assigning members to a breakout room. So, if you have 40 members attending, and want groups of 10, Zoom will randomly assign 10 people to four different groups.

Breakout Room Challenge #2, Members want to cherry pick which breakout room they go into!

Over the last three months I've followed group conscience and auto-assigned members to breakout rooms. There always seems to be someone waiting in the main room, and not choosing to join the room they've been assigned to. Often, they don't see the “join room” button on their screen. The host can simply let them know what button to click and away they go into the breakout room. It becomes a problem when the member is “cherry picking” and wants to be in a particular room with certain other members. Or decides to pop in and out of rooms until they find one they like. In a big meeting, with 40 to 50 people, the host simply does not have the time or ability to assign members “one by one” to particular rooms. That's an organizational nightmare. And how could they be expected to know who wanted to be with certain other members or friends. They need to let Zoom do that automatically. My opinion is that the host is doing service work and isn't a barista providing AA flavour of the day. In the end it comes down to members understanding that the host is, like them, trying to stay sober by attending an AA meeting, to share their experience strength and hope. They're not running a Zoom conference as a job.

Anyway, there's my confession as a “bad Zoom host”. Hosting is meaningful service and actually quite fulfilling, but I want to be able to attend my home group and not cater to those who expect AA on Zoom to be like old face-to-face meetings. It's what we have, and we need to accept it for our own spiritual health.

Walter H

A member shares... how am I coping?

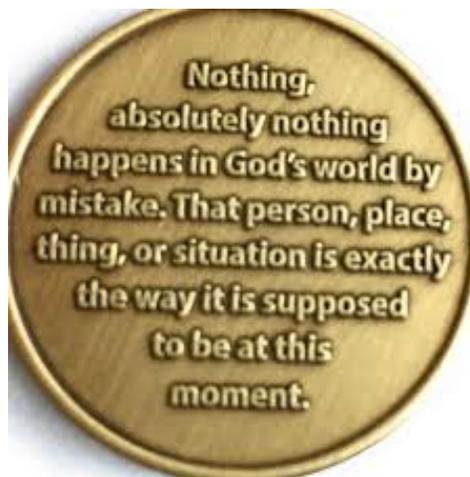
When asked to, “reflect on how I’ve been coping during the pandemic, how it’s been impacting my recovery”...I wanted to go immediately to a negative space; to put emphasis on “coping” and “impact.” Yet, these two words denote negative reactions to troublesome situations. After some thought, I chose to rework the question to, “how have I been practicing acceptance during the pandemic? and how it has enhanced my recovery?” I chose this approach because I want to live and practice a life that is positive, hopeful and uplifting.

I learned quite a while ago, through working the Steps, that to tolerate a situation was of no help to me; it left the door open for negative thoughts and self-talk. As it says in the Big Book, “Acceptance is the answer to all my problems today.” I will not lie; when the pandemic first hit, I was extremely concerned about my personal safety and that of my family and friends. My anxiety levels were high, and it showed in my day-to-day interactions with people.

I knew I had to do something about this and caught myself telling a sponsee that this was the perfect time to crack open the Big Book, to practice meditation and prayer, and to make use of the tools that AA has provided us. This was one of the times in our lives where the rubber would hit the road, and we had been given an opportunity to enhance our spiritual wellbeing. At that moment, I made a conscious decision that, I too, must accept the fact that I was going to be physically isolated from my peers, and in order to deal with this, I needed to dig deep into the AA toolbox.

Therefore, I started to dedicate more time to my daily meditation and prayer practice. I began to

meditate on specific spiritual principles such as loving kindness, acceptance, equanimity, and love for all. I began to talk more with fellow members, to share my anxieties and fears. I’ve regularly attended my home group on Zoom, as well as other Zoom meetings with my trusted spiritual guides, joined a Drop the Rock study group, and reached out to family members. Daily, I set out spiritual intentions for myself. Be kind. Be present. Be compassionate. Be loving. Be free of fear and anxiety.



With the help of my partner, I’ve watched what I am eating, done some exercise, and communicated with her about my feelings, my concerns and my fears. I have found that once these thoughts are put out there, they lose a lot of their power.

There have been times where I have lashed out and acted inappropriately. After all, I am human. But again, I take these moments as a time to accept that my recovery from this insidious condition called alcoholism is a lifelong journey. I acknowledge that AA has given me resources to help in my day-to-day living, no matter what is going on.

So, to answer the question, how am I “coping” with the pandemic? I have accepted it. I am not drinking nor am I resisting what has been asked of me by society. How has this impacted my recovery? It has hit me hard that with the guidance of my Higher Power, with the willingness to seek and nurture a relationship with that Higher Power – and practice a principled life – most situations in life can be an opportunity for me to get closer to my higher self..

Dan L

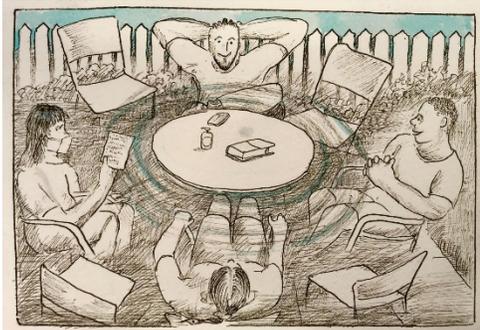
Best practices for AA home groups



1. Encourage your inner circle to stick around after an online meeting, to identify members who have not been attending.
2. Delegate, and ask members to start reaching out to those who have not been seen at recent meetings.
3. Ask newcomers if they could stay for a few minutes after the online meeting in order to share their contact information.
4. Following the meeting, ask members to discreetly contact a newcomer, offering to help them directly, or introduce them to someone else who might provide temporary sponsorship.
5. Schedule an additional online meeting for newcomers, to help them feel more connected to the fellowship. Or meet in the park, being mindful of physical distancing.
6. Canvass your home group members for those who are seeking service opportunities, and ask them to host a newcomer's meeting.
7. Make sure if your home group has a Telephone Answering Service (TAS) shift commitment that a volunteer has been identified. Strongly consider committing your home group to a TAS shift if you do not currently have one. Email: tas@ottawaaa.org
8. Encourage members of your home group to volunteer to put their names on the 12-Step call list, and be willing to reach out to the suffering alcoholic who has contacted TAS for help. Email: 12step@ottawaaa.org
9. Ask your home group members if anyone has an extra computer (with current technology: a camera and microphone) they can lend to someone who is not able to access an online meeting.
10. Be more vigilant about 7th Tradition contributions, even if your home group's ongoing expenses are modest. Extra funds raised can be directed to Intergroup, District and GSO.
11. Set up a small committee of three or four members to start developing a "Stage-3 reopening" action plan.

What's working, what's not from Page 1

There's little doubt that AA – and closer to home, Ottawa Area Intergroup – responded remarkably well to the sudden arrival of Covid-19. Dozens of local home groups quickly moved online, and now four months in, close to 120 virtual meetings a week are accessible in the National Capital Region.



“We gave AAs a place to go, and they responded. Some of us were more tech savvy than others, but we adapted. We helped encourage our fellow members to make that leap of faith, and surrender to a new reality, and a new way of congregating with our friends in the program,” says Harry B.

We quickly learned to celebrate anniversaries, to give out virtual chips. In some cases, we even hand delivered those chips to people at home. We identified newcomers in our midst and asked them to stick around after the Zoom meeting to share contact information. We opened the door to sponsorship.

Sponsorship – at a distance

How is it possible to sponsor someone you've never met in person? The pandemic is teaching us that, like sobriety, anything is possible if we can be honest, open and willing to try new things, and ask for help.

“I've recently gone through Steps 1, 2 and 3, over FaceTime, with a newcomer. To be with someone who really wants what you have. To experience those ah ha moments. To hear it in their voice, to see the tears running down their face. That's still very spiritually uplifting, even at a distance,” says Jo D.

Missing in action

Many of us have rejoiced in this new and bigger digital world of AA. We've jumped into the time

machine and popped up in virtual meeting rooms all over the planet. We've welcomed expats, living abroad, to 'click' and rejoin old homes groups here in Ottawa.

But we've also seen members get lost in the shuffle. Be it no computer, or old technology without a camera or microphone, or a cell phone without a long-distance plan.

“We've lost touch with the true meaning of home group. We need to be asking each other 'who have we not seen lately?' As individuals, we also need to be taking it upon ourselves to reach out to members who are not getting to zoom meetings. That's why we join a home group, so that we can help each other stay sober,” says Mike B.

What's old becomes new again

Meanwhile, back on Shirley's deck in the Glebe, the four women have arrived, carrying their own Big Book and beverage. They've stopped to sanitize their hands before taking their places, at a proper physical distance from each other.

Seated in a circle, face to face, they do what alcoholics do – they share. They share about a “daily reflection,” or a Step, or anything that pertains to their journey of recovery. They give of themselves, through their thoughts, feelings, challenges, and triumphs. They connect.

“What's old has become new again. Decades ago, in the fellowship's early days, this is how AAs supported one another. They met in each other's living rooms, and around their kitchen tables. We're not re-inventing the wheel by any means, we're just doing what we've always done, and what has become more institutionalized over time.”

The OPP Creative Corner

Covid-19 is giving us gifts. We have more time to reflect and to create. Our new "Creative Corner" is a place where we can share what AA members are doing with extra time on their hands during the pandemic. **Send us your poetry, or your paintings, or your photographs.** You can reach us at: newsletter@ottawaaa.org

Seven Years

by Mark L

Stittsville Second Chance Group

Seven years ago...

I had to confess,
I was powerless,
Couldn't stop,
Wouldn't stop.
Like a prize fighter,
Going round after round,
Unsustained breaks here
and there,

Seven years ago...

Ripe with anger...
With confusion...
Delusion...
Heartbreak in my wife's
eyes,
Trauma,
To my surprise,
In my children's eyes.

Seven years ago...

This can't be me,
I'm sick,
Got the family gene?
I'm not this mean.
Brief moments of clarity,
I'll be ok perhaps,
Another relapse,

One year ago, though...

I walked in a door,
Man shook my hand,
"My name is Chris,"
I'll never forget his grip,
With a quivering lower lip,
Grabbed a coffee,
Took a sip.

One year ago...

I listened to others,
Instead of myself
Talked to the Old Timers,
HEARD their stories,
Started to heal,
Started to feel,
Reconnected with my higher
power.

Today...

I still struggle,
Still have Anger,
Have confusion...
Delusion...
But I also have a
homegroup,
A fellowship...
A sponsor!

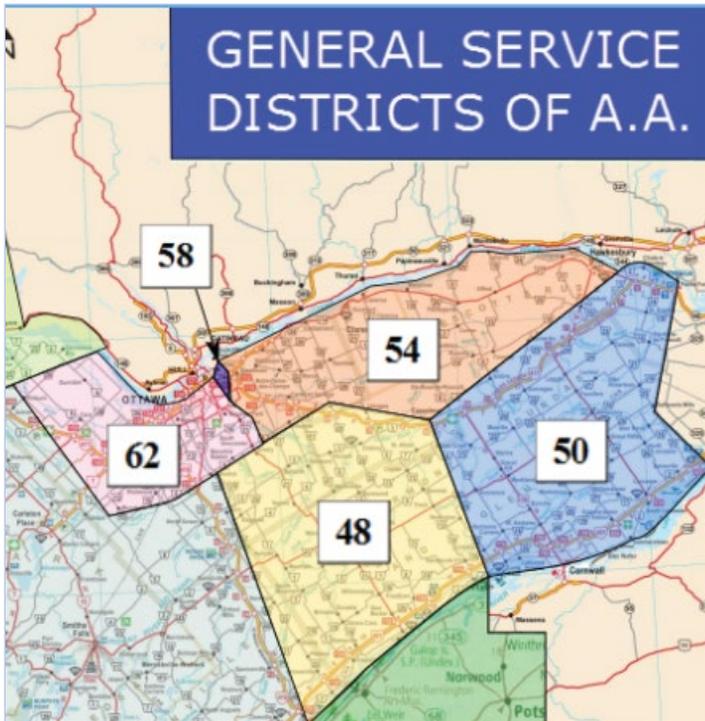
Today...

One day at a time,
I made it this far,
Humbled and grateful,
Happy and alive,
Scared to think,
I could lose it all again,
With just one drink.

From the AA archives...

How one Ottawa District become three, 1977-1980 history

The first recorded minutes from the Old Ottawa District in the Ottawa AA Archives Repository is December 1976. The district's name was the Ottawa District General Service Committee.



The first mention of the possibility of the district splitting is in the August 21, 1977 minutes. There was quite a bit of discussion, and it was decided to hold a vote at the November 1977 meeting after groups were consulted. It was actually not discussed until the December 1977 meeting.

A motion was made for "all in favour of dividing the Ottawa District." A show of hands indicated that those in attendance were unanimously against the split. A question was asked "is this problem now finished? Yes or No? Leo M, the District Committee Member (DCM), answered "yes, it is finished". In the January 15, 1978 Minutes of the East Ontario Area Committee, it was written "the Big Bug-A-Boo" is Ottawa, where they have upwards of sixty groups, and at their district meeting in December 1977, voted down the division of that District.

This subject was far from finished. It was brought up time and time again from 1977 until February 17, 1980, when under Old Business, Jack T, DCM, presented a

suggested agenda for a Re-Districting Committee to be completed by mid-September 1980. The committee was formed with many directions on how to have groups participate in the process.

On June 15, 1980 a meeting was held to hold elections for the new Districts. Out of 71 letters sent out to groups to re-district or not, 53 Groups responded affirmatively to the proposal. Only 2-3 Groups were opposed or concerned regarding the proposal.

The following new Districts were formed along with DCM's, Alternate DCM's:

Area Q: DCM – Stu M; Name – Ottawa Bytown

Area S: DCM – Ron H

Area T: DCM – Ron B, Alternate DCM – Stan C

Area R: DCM Bev K, Alternate DCM – Ozzie L

At the September 20, 1981 Eastern Ontario Area Committee meeting, the Alternate Delegate, Tommy H, gave a presentation on Assigning of District Identifiers to Group Numbers. Up until now, the Eastern Ontario Area Committee used areas to define where Districts were located. Tommy was then asked to propose a numbering system for Districts, which he did. A motion was made that "The District Numbering System herewith presented be adopted" was made and carried. From this point on, the following Areas were now numbered to:

Area Q: District 58

Area S: District 62

Area T: District 48

Area R: District 54

On the road to Vancouver 2025: Minneapolis 2000

Local AA historian, Mike B, has written series of stories that were leading up to the 15th International Convention, in Detroit, in July of this year. Due to the pandemic, the event was cancelled. But *OPP* continues to bring you Mike's insightful and informative glimpses of conventions past. Thanks Mike.

The eleventh AA International Convention was held in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 2000, from June 29 – July 2. The theme was, **Pass It On – Into the 21st Century** and AA was celebrating its 65th anniversary. An estimated 47,500 attended, down about 8,500 from the previous convention five years earlier.

Friday night, for the "Big Meeting", AA members from around the world, participate in what has become known as the world's largest AA meeting. The opening flag ceremony is always the high point of the convention, and this year did not disappoint. Flag bearers from 87 countries carried their colours, many dressed in traditional costume, to tremendous applause from the capacity filled stadium of sober drunks. Nobody knows for sure why the Serenity Prayer was not offered to begin the meeting, and the reading of "How It Works" was omitted. Was it an oversight or done on purpose?

Some of the featured speakers over the weekend were, Tom I, Searcy W and "Smitty" S ("Smitty" is Dr. Bob's son). While in prison, Tom I joined AA; the program, and God's help, turned his life around, 180 degrees. He was then just one year away from retiring as warden of that same prison in which he was first held as an inmate. In his own words, "Miracles don't happen in AA. They are a fact of life for us in the program."

Searcy W, from West Texas, got sober in Dallas, May 5, 1946. He worked closely with Bill W in the early days, helping Ebby T, Bill's sponsor, get sober again in the 1950s. Searcy also helped edit the Twelve Traditions, in 1947, and get them accepted at the 1st international convention, at Cleveland, in 1950. Even though our co-founders had long passed, many felt that their message remained intact and was being carried by those present in Minneapolis.

Sources:

Box 4.5.9. - 2000

Nancy O – AA History Lovers

Jim W – AA Archivist at large (Quintana Roo, Mexico)



As always, at any International AA Convention, coffee is always top priority. One AA observed the president of the Minneapolis Convention Bureau explaining to a downtown businessman that no one firm would be given the coffee concession for our Thursday night block party, "that's not the AA way. Every restaurant has the right to sell coffee during this event!"

How we carry ourselves and the impression we leave when AA members roll into town can be summed up by Nancy O from the AA history lovers group. She recounted, "One member told me that she had come with a group on a special 'package deal' which included breakfast in the hotel each day. With Sunday's closing session starting at 9 a.m., their breakfast had been planned for 6:30 rather than 7, as on previous mornings. When they arrived, they discovered the tables had not been set. So, what did they do? Go down and raise hell with management? Hardly. They pitched in and helped the waitress. They set the tables, helped carry in the food, and all with good spirits. The waitress was overwhelmed. "Any other group would have got me fired over this. I have never met nicer people than you AAs."

I like to look at stories like these as we may be the only Big Book others see as we try to carry our 36 Principles wherever we go.

Mike B

SERVICE CALENDAR

Individual committees may organize their own online meetings.

No matter how much sobriety you have, you can help and be part of the greater whole. All AA members are welcome to attend any of the following committees:

OTTAWA INTERGROUP MONTHLY MEETING..... Second Wednesday (7:00 pm)
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue – Nepean Room)

DISTRICT 54 MEETING..... First Thursday (7:30 pm)
(Overbrook Community Centre, 33 Quill Street)

DISTRICT 58 MEETING..... First Monday (7:00 pm)
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue - Room 213)

DISTRICT 62 MEETING..... Second Monday (7:30 pm)
(All Saints Church, 347 Richmond Road - rear entrance)

CORRECTIONS FACILITIES AND TREATMENT..... Fourth Tuesday (6:30 pm)
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue - Room 108)

PUBLIC INFORMATION/ COOPERATION WITH PROFESSIONALS...Third Monday (6:30 pm)
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue - Room 108)

OTTAWA ARCHIVES..... Third Wednesday (7:00 pm)
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue - Room 108)

Is your AA Group's meeting information correct on ottawaaa.org? Please send all updates as well as temporary closures to Ottawa Intergroup at info@ottawaaa.org.

Do you have a question for the Intergroup board? Please email us with your question and you can also request an invitation to meet with us at our monthly board meeting. Send your email to chair@ottawaaa.org.

If your group needs insurance, please contact Ottawa Intergroup at info@ottawaaa.org to discuss.

“Our Primary Purpose” publishes articles reflecting the full diversity of experience and opinion found within the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. In determining content, the editor relies on the principles of the Twelve Traditions. “Our Primary Purpose” values the shared experience of individual AA members working the AA program and applying the principles of the Twelve Steps. Seeking neither to gloss over difficult issues, nor to present such issues in a harmful or contentious manner, “Our Primary Purpose” tries to embody the widest possible view of the AA Fellowship.

The editor of “Our Primary Purpose” reserves the right to accept or reject material for publication, based on the AA traditions. Note: this policy is consistent with that of the AA Grapevine.

Articles are not intended to be statements of AA policy, nor does publication of any article constitute endorsement by either Alcoholics Anonymous or Ottawa Area Intergroup. Submissions are always welcome.