

Hi Friends! My name is Carolyn and I am an alcoholic. It is a privilege to serve you as your Area 79, Panel 63 Delegate. I am thrilled to be here to report to you on the happenings at the 64th General Service Conference, which was held April 27-May 3, 2014 in Rye Brook New York. The theme of the Conference was "Communicating Our Legacies – Vital in a Changing World."

I think it is so important for us to make sure that we always connect our activities in service with our primary purpose to carry our message to the alcoholic who still suffers. There is an excerpt from the AA Service Manual (pS20) that does that beautifully in regards to the purpose of our Conference. I've asked _____ to read "Why do we need a Conference".

The late Bernard B. Smith, nonalcoholic, then chairman of our board of trustees, and one of the architects of the Conference structure, answered that question superbly in his opening talk at the 1954 meeting: "We may not need a General Service Conference to insure our own recovery. We do need it to insure the recovery of the alcoholic who still stumbles in the darkness one short block from this room. We need it to insure recovery of a child being born tonight, destined to alcoholism. We need it to provide, in keeping with our Twelfth Step, a permanent haven for all alcoholics who, in the ages ahead, can find in A.A. that rebirth which brought us back to life. "We need it because we, more than all others, are conscious of the devastating effects of the human urge for power and prestige which we must insure can never invade A.A. We need it to insure A.A. against government, while insulating it against anarchy; we need it to protect A.A. against disintegration while preventing overintegration. We need it so that Alcoholics Anonymous, and Alcoholics Anonymous alone, is the ultimate repository of its Twelve Steps, its Twelve Traditions, and all of its services. "We need it to insure that changes within A.A. come only as a response to the needs and wants of all A.A., and not of any few. We need it to insure that the doors of halls of A.A. never have locks on them, so that all people for all time who have an alcoholic problem may enter these halls unasked and feel welcome. We need it to insure that Alcoholics Anonymous never asks of anyone who needs us what his or her race is, what his or her creed is, what his or her social position is."

For the benefit of those of you who may not be familiar with the service structure, here it is in a nutshell:

- The structure of Alcoholics Anonymous is shown in our upside-down triangle. The groups are on top and the Conference, GSO, AAWS, AAGV and the GSB are at the bottom. The Delegate serves to connect the Groups (through their Districts and Area Committee) to the bottom of the triangle. Bill W. wrote in Concept I: "The A.A. groups today hold ultimate responsibility and final authority for our world services".
- In Concept II, Bill added that the groups "delegated to the Conference complete authority for the active maintenance of our world services and thereby made the Conference . . . the actual voice and effective conscience for our whole Society."
- It is the responsibility of everyone in General Service (General Service Representatives, District Committee Members, Area Committee, and Conference Members) to ensure that the communication regarding the needs, wants, and feelings of our Fellowship and the activities of General Service Office, AA Grapevine, AA World Services, and General Service Board are communicated both up and down our upside-down triangle. That is how the structure works and that is what we are here to do today.

The U.S./Canada Conference structure is the framework in which our "general services" are carried out. These services include maintaining group records, maintaining our GSO archives, and providing shared experience regarding AA to the public, professionals, and AA members. It also includes providing tools assist with our

most vital of tasks, carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. In many cases this is accomplished through the committees and includes matters like literature, public information, CPC, Corrections and more.

This year the General Service Conference consisted of 133 voting members. 93 Delegates (one from each Area in the US/Canada service structure), 20 trustees who serve on the General Service Board, 5 directors from the AAWS and AAGV Boards, 15 GSO and AAGV staff (including the GSO General Manager and the AAGV Executive Editor). We were provided with some statistics about the Delegates this year and the average age was 59 years, average length of sobriety was 21 years, and average length of service was 17 years.

The General Service Conference is a year-around process. At the annual Conference meeting, matters of importance to the Fellowship as a whole are first considered and discussed by one of the Conference committees, then brought to the full Conference in the form of committee recommendations which are then debated and voted on. After the Conference, the delegate reports back to the areas. Meanwhile, the work recommended by the Conference is carried out by the staff and boards.

The participation of the fellowship also continues year-around. Every A.A. member has something to say about the Fellowship's present and future — and A.A.'s welfare is central to the agenda of every General Service Conference. Many of the agenda items come from groups, districts and areas who propose an idea for discussion.

In Area 79, our Pre-Conference Assembly is a critical part of this communication process and serves a very important role in ensuring that our Delegate is informed of the Areas' thoughts, wishes and concerns. I could not have hoped to be better prepared by our Area. I am always impressed with the care, attention and dedication of the Groups and Members in our Area. I am very grateful for your efforts as it made a world of difference to me as your trusted servant.

The Conference may be about the business of AA, but it is definitely spiritual in nature. In our Conference Charter it states "That in all its proceedings, the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the A.A. Tradition, taking great care that the Conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle; that none of the Conference members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others; that all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive, or an incitement to public controversy; that though the Conference may act in the service of Alcoholics Anonymous and may traditionally direct its world services, it shall never enact laws or regulations binding on A.A. as a whole or upon any A.A. group or member thereof, nor shall it perform any other such acts of government; and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action."

I have to tell you that I would never have imagined that I would be a member of the General Service Conference. In fact, in my early efforts to get sober and my rather bumpy early sobriety I am quite certain that no one looked at me and said "now there is a future delegate". Like many of us, I didn't come to AA until I was out of options. By the time I was 30 I had drunk enough to end up tube-fed due to chronic pancreatitis, had both military and civilian criminal convictions, had been to treatment involuntarily more than once, lost jobs and relationships, and broke both bones and promises on a regular basis. Alcohol was the only solution I had to the problem of me until some AA members carried the message of our program of recovery to me....and walked with me (with a lot of patience and tolerance) so I could recover from a truly hopeless state of mind and body. Once I began to grow along spiritual lines I was filled with gratitude and a desire to be of service, and that is how it came to be that I am your current delegate. I just put my hand up whenever something needed to be done. Service is really special, but our servants aren't! We are all equals — one alcoholic talking

to another. Any one of us can put up our hand and take our turn. In fact, there is a good chance that there is a future delegate in this room today.

I travelled with my husband Joe and his son Cameron. We arrived at Westchester County Airport on Friday April 25th. Our cab driver from the airport to the hotel was a local and his passion for his community was contagious. He told us about the local history and some of the places to see and after the conference we took a couple of his suggestions. Friday night Joe and Cameron took the train into Manhattan while I got organized and prepared for the week ahead. They guests who travel with the Conference members do so at their own expense. Joe and Cameron were able to take in the Manhattan sites while I was busy in meetings. There are volunteers from the NYC intergroup who organize activities for the guests and they go above and beyond to make it a great experience for them.

Although the Conference doesn't formally start until Sunday, there are some activities on Saturday. There was a meet and greet, an open AA meeting, and the remote communities sharing session. It was a real honour to be one of the presenters at the remote sharing session. I was able to tell everyone a little about our experience with remote communities in Area 79.....and show off the spectacular work of our Area 79 remote communities committee by bringing our new remote workbook and kit. I left these with the GSO in case our experience may be shared with other areas. I have to let you know that Area 79 is really trail-blazing in the area of remote communities. Both our experience (as shared in my presentation) and our materials were very well received.

The official opening was Sunday morning. We were welcomed by Terry Bedient (Chair, GSB) who also took that opportunity to remember our dear friend and Western Canada Regional Trustee Marty W who passed away earlier this year. There was an orientation; and then presentations and "whats on your mind" sessions. From there it was right into the work with the joint meetings where the conference committees met with the corresponding trustees committees. My committee assignment was to the conference committee on trustees, and I was also blessed to serve as chair of this committee.

Sunday night there was an opening dinner and AA meeting. Joe and I had a great time and I'm so glad we did because it was the last time we saw each other awake for the rest of the week. Monday and Tuesday were filled with committee work and reports from the GSB, AAWS, AAGV and the financial presentation. I have brought copies of the finance presentation for those who would like and I would be happy to get you copies of the other reports if you would like, just let me know.

Here are some highlights from these reports.....

- You may remember "the initiatives and the plan" from last year. Basically, it was a proposal aimed to improve the communications between GSB, AAWS and AAGV. Although the Conference did not approve the proposed structural changes, we did encourage the board to pursue the other initiatives that centred about improving communications and efficiencies. The GSB has reviewed the 14 initiatives and decided to add a 15th with the working title of "Serving the Fellowship." In November, the board heard A.A.W.S. and A.A.G.V. Status Reports regarding progress made on the Initiatives. It was evident that positive efforts were underway on all fronts. Up until that point, the two corporate boards had discussed the issues essentially in isolation. Both reports recommended that representatives from each board (and perhaps trustees not serving on either board) collaborate to move these efforts even further. There is a new joint committee to facilitate this process.
- At its February meeting the board approved updates to Nominating procedures for selection of the G.S.B. chair, G.S.O.'s general manager and the Grapevine's executive editor/Publisher.

- GSB had an ad hoc committee on group safety. The report reaffirmed the findings of a 2009 GSB report on the same topic and supplied additional thoughtful suggestions. The board agreed to refer a request to the trustees' Literature Committee and a separate request to the trustees' Committee on Public Information related to safety and anonymity in A.A.
- The US/Canada service structure participates in several international events. Last year that included:
 - the 18th REDELA (Meeting of the Americas) in Salinas, Ecuador
 - the European Service Meeting in Frankfurt, Germany
 - the Sub-Saharan Africa Service Meeting that was held in Johannesburg, South Africa where those in attendance represented the nations of Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Nigeria.
 - the Asia-Oceania Service Meeting (AOSM) that was held in Irkutsk, Russia (which is in Siberia)
 These meetings are invaluable to countries with emerging AA service structures; they provide opportunity to discuss the challenges of creating service structures, literature distribution and practicing A.A. principles in all their affairs.
- As of December 2013, there are 69 translations of *Alcoholics Anonymous* in distribution, with 17 new translations pending.
- A net total of 1921 new A.A. groups in the U.S. and Canada were listed at G.S.O. last year. Each new group's general service representative (G.S.R.) or contact receives A.A. literature and basic information to encourage the group to link with their local structure and support Twelfth Step activities.
- The www.aa.org website redesign is complete and we should see it by the end of June. The redesign is intended to provide visitors with greater ease in navigating the site, more intuitive search functionality, and a more contemporary design. Some of the new features include an enhanced "Find A.A. Near You" page and an updated Archives portal, as well as a more user-friendly organization of information for A.A. trusted servants.
- The last G.S.O. employee personally hired by Bill W., Joe M., retired in April 2014
- In 2013, G.S.O. welcomed 1,942 visitors. It is not unusual to see visitors standing quietly with tears in their eyes in front of the multiple translations of the Serenity Prayer in the entrance hallway – many of whom have travelled great distances to visit G.S.O. and to express their gratitude for their sobriety. If you are ever in New York, be sure to drop by your office. They will be happy to see you!
- Grapevine's average monthly print circulation in 2013 was 77,126, which is 6,123 less than 2012; there are also 5,175 online subscribers. The average bimonthly circulation of La Viña was 10,145 (this is 988 above 2012 levels). Grapevine ended 2013 with net income of \$315,007 against budgeted net income of \$11,954. La Viña is published by A.A. Grapevine and expenses not covered by income are funded by the General Service Board as a service to the Fellowship (as per a prior Conference Advisory Action). The net cost for 2013 was \$142,545.
- Not only was no drawdown from the Reserve Fund required during 2013, but (in March 2014) AAGV contributed made a contribution of \$260,000 to the Reserve Fund itself! The A.A. Grapevine Board expressed their deep gratitude to the GV staff for these tremendous achievements.

- Should the Fellowship desire that Grapevine and La Viña continue into the future additional subscribers (online or print) will be required.
- The combined bottom-line results for 2013 were \$204,215. This is comprised of General Fund - \$2,601,097, AAWS \$2,632,651, AAGV \$315,205, LaVina -\$142,544.
- The reserve fund is currently at 10.9 months operating expenses and is managed to be between 9-12 months.
- Some current statistics: Cost to provide services last year was \$6.84 per member and \$147 per group. Contributions received were \$4.97 per member and \$107 per group. Overall, 42.5% of groups contribute to support our GSO. In Area 79 it is 49.2%. The shortfall is covered through revenues from literature sales. This has been the case since the Big Book was 1st printed – but is not very sustainable in a world where people are buying less and less printed material and relying more and more on online and digital resources.
- The following statement was adopted by the GSB to speak to this situation: “The A.A. spiritual principle of self-support enables us to pursue our primary purpose of carrying the message to the still-suffering alcoholic with a shared sense of responsibility for our lifesaving work and without interference or financial dependence on outsiders. From our Fellowship's earliest days, the expenses of the General Service Office, and the world services provided by it, have exceeded the amount derived from contributions of A.A. groups and members. As a result, providing these needed services has necessarily been supported in part by income from the sale of A.A. literature. It is the policy of the General Service Board that income from literature sales should only be in amounts required to allow continued provision of vitally needed services and maintenance of a Reserve Fund. We hope that the day will come when A.A. groups and members, through their contributions, will be able to fund fully the services provided by the General Service Office. If that is achieved, revenues from literature sales will only be needed in amounts necessary to cover the actual costs associated with literature production and to maintain a Reserve Fund.”

On Tuesday we also wrapped up our work in the committees, the final order of business being to elect the new committee chair. I was thrilled to learn that both of the Panel 64s from our region were elected! What a beautiful affirmation of the quality of AA leaders to be found in our Western Canada Region!!! Michelle D-K (Area 78 delegate) will chair the Agenda Committee and Clint M (Area 80 delegate) will chair the public information committee. Woo Hoo!

On Wednesday we began the day with our inventory groups. Each inventory group was composed of trustees, directors, staff, and delegates. In the group I was assigned to we discussed questions such as:

-Reflecting on Concept Eleven, does the General Service Board exercise serious care in having the best possible assistance in carrying out their duties? How can this process be improved?

-Does the current role of the board most effectively address the needs of the Fellowship?

-Is the selection/election process for trustees and directors effective and impartial/fair?

-What more could be done to ensure broad diversity of representation in our A.A. leaders?

There were a total of 15 questions discussed, in 5 groups. The full report is not available yet, but I will be circulating it to you, through your DCMs, as soon as I receive it.

This is the 1st time the Conference has done a formal inventory of itself and this was the 2nd of 3 years. As exciting as it has been to be a part of it....I am even more excited to see how all of this input is used to better our service efforts in the future.

The matter of the Western Canada Regional Trustee vacancy was addressed at our Regional lunch and the group conscience of the delegates of our region was to leave it vacant for the remainder of the term. We are very blessed to have Barb K (trustee-at-large Canada) filling in this role for us. I am confident that she will serve us very well for the upcoming year (ending April 2015), after that another General Service Board member will take on the role of filling in. This will be either the eastern Canada regional trustee or the new trustee-at-large Canada.

Although we all agreed that this was best under the circumstances, there was discussion about the need to reconsider the current options available in the case of an unplanned regional trustee vacancy which are to fill it for a 1 year term with someone who would then be ineligible for any further service on the GSB or leave it vacant. It is my opinion that the current method of dealing with regional trustee vacancies falls short of fully serving the region with the vacancy, impacts another region and/or GSB member, and poses a matter of concern for the overall functioning of the GSB, AAWS and AAGV boards. Particularly if the vacancy were to occur in one of the very large regions (of 15 or 18 areas). In the scope of my experience on the trustees committee I have learned a lot about the slates and how the rotation works under normal circumstances and when there is a vacancy. I will be submitting a proposal to change the current practice to the Trustees Nominating Committee for their consideration. I'll be sure to share it with you when I do.

I spoke of this matter during one of the "what's on your mind" sessions and received a lot of support and amazing response from several members of the GSB. It was especially touching to see how committed Barb K is to serving our region in spite of her own health concerns. Both Clayton V. (South West Region trustee), and Bob W., (trustee-at-large US) offered to personally come to support our Area and our Region in any way needed. While I would truly love to see these 2 friends again, and it would be fantastic if they were invited here....the importance of having our own regional trustee who keeps us directly informed regarding our General Service Board cannot be overstated. Another beautiful outcome of this discussion was the offer extended by Andrew W, (West Central Region Trustee) for our Western Canada delegates to participate in a quarterly conference call that he holds with his delegates. We will be thrilled to accept and doubly thrilled to learn that this offer was enthusiastically supported by all of the delegates in his region. It is humbling to once again see and touch the power of one alcoholic helping another.....at see that it works every level.

Wednesday afternoon was the elections for the new Eastern Canada and Pacific regional trustees. It was an absolute privilege to get to co-chair these elections along with the Chair of the Trustees Nominating Committee, Roberta L. She conducted the 3rd Legacy election process for the Eastern Canada Trustee and Richard B came out of the hat. I did the Pacific Region Trustee election and Joel C came out of the hat. I personally reviewed all 25 resumes submitted for these positions and the slates; and it is hard to put into words the feeling of knowing that we have such capable and dedicated servants who have made themselves available to serve at this level. AA elections always make me cry and this was no exception.

Also on Wednesday, I attended the joint meeting for the secondary committee I was assigned to, archives. The secondary committees meet over the meal breaks on Wednesday and Thursday. We wrapped up our committee work at the end of lunch time Thursday. It was wonderful to be assigned to a secondary committee and have the chance to participate in this way and learn more about archives.

Wednesday night, Thursday and Friday we heard and the committee report backs and debated the agenda items. I have printouts of the full list of all of the Advisory Actions, Additional Committee Considerations,

Recommendations that did not carry, as well as Floor Actions here for you. I'm sure you are relieved to know that I will not try to go over all 70+ of them here with you, but there are a few I would like to let you know about.

Something that stood out for me was the conference theme and presentation topics selected by the agenda committee. The choosing of these topics is an opportunity to ensure that both the Conference and the Fellowship are called upon to discuss matters of serious importance to the future of AA. The theme for the 65th GSC is "Our Common Welfare Through Gratitude in Action" and the presentation topics are:

- Diversity in A.A. - Our Heritage of Inclusion
- Safety and Respect – Practicing the Principles Begins in our Home Group
- Safeguarding our Traditions through the Evolution of Technology
- Inventory – Looking Back to Move Ahead

It is my hope that our Area, and many of our Districts and events within the Area, will make use of these topics for sharing sessions and workshops. This is one of the ways that everyone can participate in the year-around conference process.

In the Archives committee we recommended that the updated video, *Markings on the Journey* be approved. The video was shown to the Conference at it was nearly unanimous.

The Cooperation With the Professional Community Committee discussed the proposed change to the pamphlet "If You Are a Professional..." which was for those who request to have attendance slips signed at AA meetings. It read that it needed to be signed by the group secretary. Our Area was in favour of it remaining that way. The change that carried was that it now states to have an "AA member" sign. This is an example of where practiced Concept III and used my right of decision. I voted I favour of this change because the previous wording suggests that the group secretary has some sort of authority and also requires the group secretary to sign these slips, when it should be at the discretion of each member to decide if they will or will not do so. There is a responsibility that goes along with the right of decision and that is to report back to those we serve what we did and why....which is what I am doing now.

I am thrilled to report that the Corrections committee recommended, and the Conference approved, a new video be developed to replace "It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell". The old one was very outdated.

The Finance committee showed some incredible leadership. There was several times during the "whats on your mind" sessions that members expressed their concern about the fact that not all conference materials are available in all 3 languages of the conference (Spanish, French, and English). They recommended, and the Conference approved unanimously that: "Because all Conference members are considered equal, all members should have equal access to Conference material and that a plan be created by the General Service Office to translate Conference Material (background material, Conference Manual etc.) into French and Spanish for use during the Conference, with a report being presented to the 2015 General Service Conference. This plan may include coordinating the use of the volunteer network throughout the Fellowship, hiring professional translators or any other facilities that the office deems necessary. The report should include costs and any other considerations deemed necessary to allow timely translations to occur."

The Grapevine committee discussed the request to reconsider publishing the "Alcoholism at Large" section of the Grapevine and took no action; which means they were not in favour of the proposal. However, the chair of this committee later made a Floor Action that the section be discontinued. This was discussed and the Conference was not in favour of discontinuing it.

The Literature committee had a very full agenda which included:

- The revised pamphlet "Circles of Love and Service" that was approved.
- The pamphlet on spirituality with the title "Many Paths to Spirituality" that was approved.
- They discussed a suggested change to the "Twelve Concepts for World Service Illustrated" and took no action.
- They discussed suggestions for changes to the pamphlet "Questions & Answers on Sponsorship" and took no action.
- They discussed a suggestion (from Area 79) to create a pamphlet for alcoholics with mental illness and took no action. The committee agreed that this subject is adequately addressed in current A.A. literature. This item also came back as a Floor Action. There was a lot of discussion. It was interesting to me that several of our Class A (non-alcoholic) Trustees spoke in favour of this proposal. In the end, it achieved a majority but fell short of the substantial unanimity required.
- The committee recommended both the removal of the following text from page five in the *Living Sober* booklet: "Many of us have come to believe that our alcoholism is an addiction to the drug alcohol; like addicts of any sort who want to maintain recovery, we have to keep away from the first dose of the drug we have become addicted to." And the addition of the statement "non-alcoholics are welcome to attend open meetings as observers" to the open meeting side of the Primary Purpose (Blue) Card. Neither of these proposals were carried by the Conference.

The Public Information committee also has a busy agenda. There were several changes to the membership survey. There was a review of the PSAs resulting in retiring 2 of them and creating one new one. They reviewed the 2014 Comprehensive Media Plan and made several suggestions and expressed strong support for the forward-looking vision of the Comprehensive Media Plan. In light of ongoing anonymity concerns, the committee suggested that delegates and other trusted servants utilize a variety of means, such as workshops, newsletters, panels, delegate reports, local A.A. websites, skits, presentations, etc., to stimulate A.A. members' discussion on how to maintain anonymity at the public level. The committee recommended changes to the anonymity card, which were not carried by the Conference. This, too, came back as a Floor Action which also did not carry.

The Report and Charter committee added a revised job description for Registrar in the Service Manual and reviewed and approved several editorial changes. They considered a request to modify Article 3 of the Current Conference Charter and took no action. The committee agreed that the proposed modification was unnecessary, noting that the existing phrasing of Article 3 adequately addresses the process for making a change to Article 12 of the Charter, the Twelve Traditions of A.A., or the Twelve Steps of A.A.

In the Trustees committees' joint meeting with the Trustees Nominating committee there was discussion regarding concerns expressed by some members regarding the GSB approved updates to Nominating procedures for selection of the G.S.B. chair, G.S.O.'s general manager and the Grapevine's executive editor/Publisher. The Trustees Nominating committee agreed to reconsider these procedures and report back to the Fellowship. We also reviewed and recommended the slates for the GSB, AAWS, and AAGV.

There was much hard work and dedication of all conference members that was demonstrated throughout. There were many items that went through vigorous debate, in some cases for hours, only not to be carried. I'm told, and I've seen, that the Conference has a different tone and flavour each year. The 64th General Service Conference was one of unity, purpose, and detail. We were methodical and painstaking in our work, possibly a little too much so. There were certainly a lot of amendments and much word-smithing on the conference floor. Personally, I learned that although (as Bill W said) the good can be the enemy of the best.....doing only the best may paralyze us from any further action. At times, creating a starting point that is good and trusting that the trusted servants who rotate in after we are gone will improve on it may be more important than doing only the best, and preferable to not moving the discussion forward,

Friday night we were done by about 7 and closed with the serenity prayer in Navajo and the 3 languages of the Conference (French, Spanish and English).

Although it officially ends on Friday, on Saturday morning there is a closing brunch where the trustees who are rotating off of the board get to say farewell. This year it was Roberta L, Rod B, and Donald C. Although these are 3 very different people, I was touched by the common themes in their farewells. Using their own words they all spoke of; the need for the GSB to continue to foster unity both within itself and throughout the fellowship, the importance of our service leaders having vision and courage, their gratitude for their experience and the growth that came with it, and their love of AA. Not a dry eye in the room.

After the luncheon it was off to stepping stones. It was an amazing experience. I was touched to learn that Lois, herself, did almost all of the preservation and preparation. Bill and Lois had welcomed AA and Al-Anon guests to their home for many years, and Lois continued to do so after Bill's passing. She knew we would want to continue to come to their home after she was gone and she made all of the needed arrangements to ensure that it would be there for us to do so. Although, I don't think it is healthy for us to elevate our founding members to the level of God's and revere them in a way that borders on religious (which I do see sometimes); I also think it is both natural and beautiful that we feel a connection to the people who paved the way for each of us to find our own freedom from alcoholism and want to express our gratitude. It was both inspiring and humbling to sit at the very same desk where Bill did much of his writing, see Father Dowling's cane discreetly leaning in the corner, sit at the table where Ebby first reached out to a still drunk Bill and think of the thousands of grateful members who have also visited this space. I said a quiet prayer that we of Alcoholics Anonymous today always remember how fortunate we are to have life-saving program of recovery and that we always honour our responsibility to ensure it is here for the next alcoholic who comes to us in the state of despair that we all arrived in.

Later when all was said and done; Joe, Cameron and I took the advice of the cab driver who brought us from the airport when we arrived. We went to Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow (its a real place). The area was settled in the late 1600s and was the site of the revolutionary war. I love all of the old buildings and historic sites. The next day we went shopping and then had time to stop and look at Sing Sing prison on the way to the airport. It opened in 1826 and is still in use today. I imagine many alcoholics have gone through those doors. I did manage to get a picture of the sign before the guards made us leave.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the sacrifices of others that have allowed me to serve. It is nice when people say "thank you for your service", but I love doing it and it helps ensure my sobriety. Those who have truly sacrificed are my husband Joe, my family, my sponsees and my friends; not to mention the extra work taken on by my coworkers in my absence. When I arrived in AA I had nothing and no one, today thanks to our program I have a life in which to practice these principles.

There are truly no words for my gratitude for the opportunity to share this experience with all of you.

With love and service,

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