

# **INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL**

***For homosexual men and women in Alcoholics Anonymous***

***Newsletter 7***

***November 1985***

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## ***YEAR REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHAIR, JULY 1985***

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This has been a year of enlightenment and learning, after the election of my appointment as deputy chair at the semi-annual meeting held at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut on July 15, 1984 at the "Walk the Walk Round-Up". My responsibilities as the Deputy Chair began with the assignment by those present to coordinate those activities of OUR fellowship at the International World Convention - the 50th Anniversary of Alcoholics Anonymous in Montreal, (Quebec), Canada. Per the request of GSO and the prior council of the IAC, that (we) "be a part OF and not a part FROM."

July 23, 1984 began with the initial meeting in New York City at the General Service Office with the International Convention Coordinator, Sarah P. and staff members. Patricia Mc. and I, after a five hour meeting of planning, began a year of tremendous activities with positive acknowledgements from Trustees and Delegates. Our involvement within the GSO structure and working within the fellowship and OUR many men and women from all over the world and the council members has indeed been one of support and unity.

Briefly, the coordinating of those activities for "our" involvement and participation and those outcomes at the 50th International Convention has been seen by our fellowship, as one of importance and recognition, and rightly so. For us, to have such an opportunity for our fellowship to "be a part OF and not a part FROM," at such an event is an accomplishment. Of course, as human beings, there have been some who are disgruntled and those who have misperceptions. To those, I am sorry.

Our coordinating activities have included those scheduled meetings and workshops which appear in the International Convention Program Booklet:

- o Title names of two workshops and those who are participating in same.
- o An open/three speaker meeting and again the selection of those who shall participate.
- o An International Hospitality Suite and Information Center - Open to All.
- o On Saturday Night/An International Dance - Disco/Light and Laser Show - "Live and Let Live", dance. Open to All (a fundraising event).
- o Assisting many individuals with housing difficulties.

Included with the above, throughout this year there have been many contacts from individuals who were in need of twelve step work and the carrying of the message and assisting those to meet their special needs, as well as groups and Round-Up inquiries regarding traditions and suggestions of programming.

I cannot, at this time, share with you the number of letters, telephone calls, and personal contacts made during this past year. The number is tremendous. It has been a moving, if not a spiritual experience for me.

I am only a servant, as best stated in our Second Tradition. At times, on a lighter note I have felt like the "bleeding deacon", so descriptive in the Big Book. However, this experience indeed has made me closer to the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous and to my own program. To those men and women - young and old, I thank them, but especially to YOU for this experience and the opportunity to serve and to grow.

I look forward to the future as a continual growth process in my service commitment to OUR fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous and to meet those needs and challenges of the IAC to carry our message.

Alan D. Hulsman  
Deputy Chair, 84/85  
July, 1985

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## **BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS**

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Montreal, July 6 -- Forty-four thousand alcoholics converged on Montreal this weekend looking for a good time, and nobody had a hangover. They came from more than 50 countries to rejoice over the golden anniversary of Alcoholics Anonymous, to bear witness to their hope and gratitude and to celebrate with a million cups of coffee.

Far from being a self-righteous assembly of sullen ex-drunkards, the convention, the largest Montreal has been host for, was a chatty, joyful occasion, barely hinting at the individual tragedies that drove 44,000 people together. "We're survivors, all of us," explained a well-dressed woman from New York City, one of many who looked as though they didn't belong there.

Alcoholics Anonymous has come far from its origins in Akron, Ohio, when two friends, Dr. Robert H. Smith and William G. Wilson, made a pact to keep each other from getting drunk anymore. A.A. dates its founding from the last drink that "Dr. Bob" took, on June 10, 1935. Since then, A.A. has multiplied into 63,000 groups worldwide, with a membership now estimated at more than 1.3 million. A.A. has outgrown its white male middle-aged, middle-class roots. Today, one in three members is a woman (one in two in New York City). Blacks and Hispanics have begun joining. A fifth of the members are now 30 years old or younger, according to a 1983 survey, while 3 percent are under 21 and often cross-addicted to narcotics.

The workshops in Montreal included a session entitled "Gays in A.A. - Are We really Different?" Homosexuals run a high risk of alcoholism because they feel isolated from society and often pursue a life style that revolves around bars. "There's gotta be a God that conceived this program because it's for anybody who thinks they have a problem," George F. from Illinois told an audience of more than 1,000 who jammed the meeting room. "I'm black and I'm beautiful and I'm gay and free and I ain't drinking," George announced. He said he had stayed sober for 23 years, attending all kinds of A. A. meetings.

But others said they felt more comfortable in A.A. meetings run for homosexuals. "I have to learn to stay sober as a gay person living a gay life style," said Jack M. from Ontario. "For the first time, I realized I was drinking because I wanted to drink, not because I'm gay. It removed the last excuse."

Asked if she didn't find A.A. conventions depressing, the wife of one alcoholic replied that they filled her with joy. "You've got to understand that all these people would be dead if it weren't for each other."

N.Y. Times, July 8, 1985

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

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A.A. lost two invaluable members recently, members especially dear to many of us involved with IAC in our special outreach to the gay and lesbian alcoholic.

**BARRY L.**, sober some 33 years, a friend of Bill W., Marty M. and many early members of the fellowship, active right up to the end in the cause of A.A. Barry was one of the speakers at the workshop entitled "Historical Perspective: Homosexual Men and Women in A.A." at the recent International A.A. Convention in Montreal.

**GEORGE D.** was 19 years sober when he died of cancer in October. George was active in special interest groups for lesbian and gay alcoholics in N.Y. for many years before he moved to Connecticut, where he promptly founded yet another such group. George was also a founding member of IAC, and very active in its outreach program in the formative years.

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## **A.A.'S THIRD TRADITION began in 1937 according to Bill W. --**

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At about Year Two of the Akron group, a poor devil came to Dr. Bob in a grievous state. He could qualify as an alcoholic all right, and then he said, "Dr. Bob, I've got a real problem to pose you. I don't know if I could join A.A., because I'm a sex deviate."

Well, that had to go out to the group conscience. You know, up to then it was supposed that any society could say who was going to join it. And pretty soon the group conscience began to seethe and boil, and it boiled over, and "under no circumstances could we have such a pariah, such a disgrace among us," said a great many.

And you know, right then our destiny hung on a razor edge over this single case. In other words, would there be rules that could exclude so-called undesirabilities? And that caused us in that time, and for quite a time respecting this single case, to ponder what is the more important, the reputation that we shall have, what people shall think; or is it our character? And who are we, considering our records - alcoholism is quite as unlovely - who are we to deny a man his opportunity? Any man or woman?

And finally the day of resolution came, and a bunch were sitting in Dr. Bob's living room arguing what to do, whereupon dear old Bob looked around and blandly said, "Isn't it time, folks, to ask ourselves 'what would the Master do in a situation like this? Would He turn this man away?'"

And that was the beginning of the A.A. tradition that any man or woman who has a drinking problem is a member of A.A. If he says so, not whether we say so.

Now, I think that the import of this on the common welfare has already been staggering, because it takes in even more territory than the confines of our fellowship. It takes in the whole world of alcoholics. Their charter to freedom to join A.A. is assured. Indeed, it was an act in the general welfare.

-- Bill W. at the Open Meeting (Monday) of the 1968 General Service Conference

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### **ACCEPTANCE IS A TWO-WAY STREET**

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The fiftieth anniversary of AA in 1985 is a time for sharing and for gratitude. For gay people in AA, and for AA as a whole, it can also be a time for much-needed reflection.

I'm a gay man, and I rejoice in the fact that AA was there one day in 1973 when I finally somehow decided to really try to stay sober that day with the help of some people in the program. They were also gay, and they didn't feel sorry for me, or make excuses for me, or even try to change me. They simply understood and loved me just as I was. They told me things would get better if I kept coming back and if I learned about the AA program. They were so right!

When I got sober those many years ago, AA groups for gay men and lesbians were beginning to spring up here and there all over the country. Today, there are perhaps a thousand such groups, and many tens of thousands of us also go to regular nongay meetings. Gay/Lesbian groups have for sure had their growing pains; and many in AA have felt the pain but not much of the joy of the explosive growth of gay involvement in the Fellowship.

During my early sobriety, I noticed that gays in AA tended to keep to themselves, and many "straights" in AA tended to see us as separatist and divisive. There was very little communication. My gay sponsor told me right off there is no such things as "gay AA." There are gay groups of AA, he said, where "gays can feel more comfortable and relate better with a lot more honesty; but the AA program is the same everywhere."

That made good sense to me, and I did learn about AA and I managed to stay sober each day. But I also stayed rather closeted within my own gay meetings. When I went to regular meetings, I was quietly resentful because it seemed others were all talking about their wives, husbands, children, and all those heterosexual things. I had been taught from early childhood that being gay is sinful and unacceptable to society, and I had a great deal of difficulty seeing those straight people in AA as anything other than "society".

Slowly, as I grew in the program, I began to reach out to straight people just as I reached out to gay people. Slowly, many of my intense personal feelings of guilt, fear, and isolation began to fade. I began to see AA as truly a nonjudgmental program of personal recovery, and a fellowship of equals.

As AA moves into its second fifty years, I feel strongly that gay people should extend the hand of friendship to those in the Fellowship who do not know us very well. We can feel maligned if we wish. However, we do have one distinct advantage: almost all of us grew up in heterosexual homes, but many straights in AA know very little about gays.

Lack of understanding breeds distrust and fear. But it's almost impossible, especially in AA, to distrust someone who stands right there beside you, loves you, and follows the path of sobriety with you. We should not judge one another. As the Big Book says, "God alone can judge our sex situation."

I have a lesbian friend in the program who says she wears "two hats, one for my involvement in AA and the other for my work in gay rights. I try my best not to wear my gay rights hat when doing my AA work. This is something we should all strive to do, whether it be politics, religion, or whatever. And it's my AA work that really tests me; politics is easy."

I was involved with a gay roundup recently which, despite the reservations of some, invited an AA area delegate (straight) to be a panelist at a workshop on gay meetings/straight meetings. The result was a great deal of learning and a joyful opening of the doors of communication. A gay special international group within AA was joined at its meeting a few weeks ago by a member of the AA board of trustees; the love and mutual understanding which flowed from that meeting was remarkable.

My own home group invited nongay AAs to help us with workshops on service and on unity and the Traditions, and other gay/lesbian groups I attend have had great meetings by inviting nongay speakers.

I've heard a gay old-timer, with a lot more years than I have, offer this advice many times to gay AAs: "Resentments and isolation are what kill us drunks, and service and love are what help keep us alive and well. Acceptance is a two-way street. Volunteer to answer the phones at central office and ask to be put on the Twelfth Step list if you're ready. And make

sure your group contributes to central office and to the General Service Office. If you don't have a GSR (general service representative), elect one. The same goes for a central office representative and a Grapevine representative. Get involved, damn it. Get into action!"

For me, the most vital thing in AA is unity. Without unity AA could never have flourished and grown for fifty years to carry its message of hope and recovery to suffering alcoholics of every type imaginable, everywhere. Including me.

P.J., Los Angeles, Calif.

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### IAC NOTES

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Apologies to all of you who have ordered copies of the IAC Directory and other publications. Apparently we were so swamped by the overwhelming response in Montreal that most of our inventory has been depleted. We beg your indulgence, and patience, while we have the requested publications reprinted. A new Directory is scheduled for February 1986, but meanwhile we will do our best in filling our current orders. Thanks.

IAC BUSINESS MEETING - IAC will hold its next meeting at the Big Apple Roundup in New York, on Saturday, November 30, at 1pm. All are invited. Come and meet the new officers.

NEW OFFICERS - New IAC officers were elected at the AA Convention in Montreal. Alan H., former Deputy Chair, becomes Chair. The new Deputy Chair is Elaine N., from Boston. Our Treasurer is Bob D. from Toronto, and Secretary is William R., also from Toronto. Past-Chair is Patrick J. of New Mexico.

CALENDAR: There are two roundups remaining in 1985, both of them being held over the Thanksgiving weekend (November 28 - December 1):

New York: Big Apple Roundup  
P.O. Box 451, Village Station  
New York, NY 10014

Houston: Houston Roundup Committee  
P.O. Box 27703, Suite 339  
Houston, Texas 77027

Please keep sending us information about your roundups and other events for future issues of the IAC Newsletter. We hope to be a clearinghouse for information useful to members of the fellowship. We would appreciate any news items as well. Try your hand at writing something for the Newsletter; we are still interested in collecting individual stories as well. If you have any such material, please send it on to us at the address below, with "Newsletter" noted on the envelope.

IAC's FIFTH ANNIVERSARY? - We're not quite sure of the precise founding date, so we can't proclaim it unequivocally, but it seems that IAC, in one form or another, has been around for some five years now. It grew from the initial directories of gay/lesbian meetings compiled by Nancy T. in Arlington, Virginia. The idea for a lesbian/gay support group within AA was formed at the Washington Roundup in 1980 and grew into a series of meetings held in NY after the Big Apple Roundup. The IAC Charter was formally adopted at the Boston Roundup in May, 1981.

That's still very young for an organization with the scope of IAC. We maintain the following standing committees: Loners' Correspondence; GSO Liaison; Newsletter; Public Information; Lesbian Outreach; International Directory; and Literature. We are always in need of volunteers and information, so please contact us if you can help. Send your requests, information, enquiries, etc., to IAC, noting the particular committee on the envelope. This is your organization, and we need your help.

Of course, any contributions that groups and individuals can make are also much appreciated. We're truly becoming an international organization, what with the way our officers are spread out over the US and Canada, and often much time and money is spent on just coordinating all our efforts. Please help in any way you can. Groups can subscribe to the Newsletter, for instance, or order some of our publications in bulk. Write us for particulars.

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