

IAC February Newsletter
6 February 2006

Dear IAC Members,

I have been asked about the IAC and what we do. I researched material on the Internet and discovered some rather insightful information. I hope and pray that you are willing to read, because I am providing you with about 19 pages of information.

[International Advisory Council](#)

The International Advisory Council (IAC) serves the gay and lesbian members of A.A.. Our sole purpose for existing is to provide our experience, strength and hope to any arm of A.A. when called upon to do so, and to work in the spirit of UNITY and SERVICE with A.A. for the betterment of the gay and lesbian members, and A.A. as a whole. Our function is not that of a policy or decision-making board in matters affecting gay and lesbian members of A.A., nor is our function to isolate or separate ourselves from the mainstream of A.A.

That which follows has been requested of the IAC during the month of January:

From: joykline@comcast.net [mailto:joykline@comcast.net]
Sent: Thursday, January 19, 2006 01:10 PM
To: iac-aa@iac-aa.org
Subject: meetings

Hello,

I am looking for a gay al-anon support group. I live in Salisbury, Md. 21804. Do you know of anything within 50 miles of me?

*thanks,
Joy K.*

[mailto:jrpeters@earthlink.net]
Sent: Thursday, January 5, 2006 02:45 AM
To: iac-aa@iac-aa.org
Subject: So glad to find you!

Hi. My name is Jeff P. and I found out about you from the 12 step coffee shop for GLBT drunks and junkies in recovery. I live in a small, military town in Southwestern Oklahoma called Lawton, OK, USA. I feel isolated from my gay brothers and sisters. I can drive 90 miles to Live and Let Live in Oklahoma City

and do from time to time. I am curious as to the "gay friendliness" of the advertised round-ups. I know we are trained to look for the similarities rather than the differences. However, I am still a work in progress (Thank God). Is there something I can do to help? XO, Jeff P.

I found the following article at

<http://www.barefootsworld.net/aaspecialgroups.html>

I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did. It clearly defines how special interest groups became recognized by the GSO and AA World Services.

SPECIAL COMPOSITION GROUPS IN A.A.

"One of the great strengths of Alcoholics Anonymous has always been that everyone is equal and everyone is welcome. A.A.'s traditions of anonymity and self-support and singleness of purpose all contribute to this true equality of Fellowship found in A.A. meetings. So it is small wonder that "special" groups have been viewed with suspicion, alarm and sometimes-outright hostility within A.A. Nevertheless, "special" groups based on a commonality of interest beyond their common alcoholism - gender, age, race, occupation, sexual preference, etc. - have existed within A.A. since the earliest days. A number of these kinds of groups have found it helpful to organize on an international level, often holding their own conventions, with steering committees or central contacts where interested A.A.'s can write for further information. Their addresses are listed in the front of the A.A. Directories for the U.S. and Canada.

In the mid-1970's, when feelings against "special purpose" groups were at their height, the point was made that these should not be called "special purpose" groups since all A.A. groups have the same purpose: sobriety. Rather, they are "special composition" groups. In 1977, after tempers had cooled down a bit, Dr. Jack Norris, then Chairman of the General Service Board, made a presentation on the subject to the Conference. He said, in part: "When other requirements are added that might seem to exclude some alcoholics, these should be considered A.A. meetings and not A.A. groups. We have never discouraged A.A.'s from forming special-purpose meetings of any or all kinds to meet the needs of interested individuals, but we have been hesitant to consider as groups those that might seem to exclude any alcoholic, for whatever reason.

"Many members feel that no A.A. group is special and, therefore, that no group should be labeled as such or even give the impression that it is 'special.' However,

the fact is that such groups do exist...These groups feel that 'labels' serve the purpose of attraction (providing double identification) and are not intended to imply exclusion of other alcoholics."

In a Grapevine article in October of the same year, K.S. said, "When I discussed the purpose of such groups with people who attend them, they expressed a definite belief that they could not be entirely open about themselves in most regular A.A. groups. . . Homosexuals believe that the specifics of their emotional relationships would not be understood or accepted in regular A.A. meetings. Young people are convinced that their life-styles ... are not understandable to older members. And professionals feel they get more understanding from those they consider their peers, particularly in matters relating to their conduct in their professions when they were active alcoholics.

"Furthermore, there seems to be genuine concern about anonymity" -- especially, K.S. noted, among people whose professional status calls for licensing, homosexuals who are in groups made up mostly of heterosexuals, and young people who were once involved illegally with drugs. "Members of special groups are certain that many of their kind would never be able to get themselves to A.A. if they had to enter through a regular group. Whether or not we agree with this thinking, the point is that many alcoholics do believe in it. And they believe in it seriously enough to form these special groups and make them work."

Women

Women's groups were probably the first special groups to form. The first Women's group in the world is believed to be one started in Cleveland, Ohio, in June 1941. The following year, Ruth B. wrote G.S.O. from Minneapolis, "There has been some discussion here of having the women alcoholics meet in a separate group. We have heard that women do meet in separate groups in Chicago and Cleveland...We have less than a dozen women alcoholics in Minneapolis, only four of whom are very active..." Bobbie B. replied, "I suggest you write directly to Marion R., 12214 Detroit Ave., Cleveland, Ohio. Marion is the secretary of a women's group out there who recently celebrated their first anniversary. New York who has about 40 women alcoholics on their lists, 25 of whom have been dry since contacting A.A., holds a meeting once every two weeks for women only..." At about the same time, Bobbie received a similar query from Harrisburg, Pa., and replied in part, "There are over 60 in the New York [women's] group. This is remarkable, because when I first met the group a little over two years ago, there were only 2, and some thought that perhaps this program just wouldn't work for women." In a letter

which Grace O. of New York wrote Bill W. in 1945, she said, "Our gal's group now has 19 newcomers -- all in seven weeks!

San Diego, California, has had a women's group that has met continuously, every week, since September 1945. It met first at the office of the husband of one of the members, but soon rotated among the homes of the various women. By February 1946, a strong nucleus of 15 members made it possible to rent a meeting place of their own. The first Women's group in Salt Lake City listed itself with G.S.O. in the spring of 1952. Significantly, a special session for Women members was included in the program of the First International Convention of A.A. in 1950 in Cleveland. No attempt has been made to keep a count of women's groups over the years, but it is safe to say they exist in almost any sizeable community where there is A.A.

The reason was touched upon in a letter from the Archivist, Nell Wing, replying in 1979 to an inquiry from a woman writer. She explained, "It was difficult for a woman to approach A.A. in the late '30's or early '40's, and more difficult still to be accepted in an A.A. group. It was generally felt by male members that women had no place in an A.A. meeting where their presence was considered by many to be a disturbing factor. Since much of the success of the A.A. program centered around a one-to-one relationship (especially in the beginning years of the Fellowship), there was a perhaps justifiable concern that a side effect of sharing and practicing the program together might result in some hanky-panky." When an occasional woman alcoholic showed up, men felt it best not to sponsor her and often turned her over to the wives of A.A. members to befriend and offer support. As more women came in, they were actively encouraged to form their own groups.

"Duke" P., who came into A.A. in 1940, explains (with his wife Katie's corroboration) that there was sometimes resistance to women attending regular meetings by the spouses -- from both sides! That is, the wives of the men were suspicious of the motives and the behavior of the women alcoholics. And if the woman newcomer was married, her husband would forbid her to spend evening after evening with a bunch of men. So the answer was to form women's groups.

Women in A.A. decided to meet in a national conference of their own in February 1964. The purpose was "to provide a forum to share experiences common to women alcoholics; to discuss problems of particular interest; to provide opportunities to share with women from other areas; and to learn how to be of greater service to those who still suffer." At the first National A.A. Women's Conference, held in Kansas City, Missouri, 45 women were present. It has been held annually ever since, and attendance has grown to several hundred. The permanent motto of the event is, "The Language of the Heart Will Be Spoken Here."

Black Alcoholics

Alcoholics Anonymous always welcomed any alcoholic, in principle -- regardless of race, color, religion or any other characteristic that might otherwise set him apart. However, A.A. is inescapably a part of the society in which it exists. And when the Fellowship was founded -- and for three decades thereafter -- de facto discrimination against Blacks was accepted in many places. Later, and indeed even now, when a Black alcoholic comes into a white A.A. meeting, even though he may be warmly welcomed with every effort made to make him feel at home, he often feels "different" and is likely to drift away.

Although alcoholism is rampant in the Black community, A.A. has never enjoyed a percentage of Black membership equivalent to the percentage of Blacks in the general population. Joe McQ., himself the first Black member of A.A. in Little Rock, Arkansas, believes cultural differences mitigate against Blacks seeking help - in A.A. or elsewhere. In his day, he says, from the viewpoint of the young Black male, his world was divided rather sharply between the pious, spiritual-singing church-goers who were teetotalers; and the bottle-drinking, hip group who hung out in the pool halls and on the street corners. And the drinkers identified any nondrinker as a part of the pious group, of which they wanted no part. This stereotype has faded in the last two decades with the rapid assimilation of Blacks into the general society, but the fact that A.A. is not reaching Black alcoholics as it should has been a continuing concern of the General Service Board and G.S.O.

The problem was to be the topic of a General Sharing Session on a Board weekend in January 1986. Garrett T., the first Black Trustee (1983-87), shared that when he came to A.A., Blacks were not welcomed at white meetings in Washington, D.C., so his home group has always been a Black group, the Mideast. It was brought out that in keeping with its Traditions, A.A. has not taken an aggressive or advocative role with regard to racial causes, but has "let it happen." The result, in A.A., has been that in many parts of the country, integration came earlier and easier than segregation (i.e., formation of Black groups.)!

The first inquiry received at G.S.O. from a "colored" alcoholic came from Pittsburgh in 1943. In reply to the next inquiry in October 1944, Bobbie B. wrote, "We do not have a colored group anywhere and the problem is popping up more and more every day. In Pittsburgh they have a colored member, and I suggest you write and find out how the situation is handled there." In 1945, however, there were Black groups in both Washington, D.C., and St. Louis, Missouri. In January of the following year, a group started in Los Angeles and within a year had 20 members. In June, the Outhwaite group in Cleveland, Ohio, registered at G.S.O. with eight

members. And a month later there was news of a colored group in Charleston, South Carolina. In the same period, colored groups began in Kansas City, Missouri, and Toledo, Ohio.

By 1947, the pace picked up. A colored group began in New York's Harlem, and two were reported in New Jersey. Philadelphia's first negro group met for the first time at the end of June, and a group was formed in Cincinnati. The first negro group in Crowley, Louisiana, was started in May 1949. By 1952, there were about 25 known negro groups, according to Ann M., who was especially dedicated to helping A.A. reach Black alcoholics. As no effort has been made at G.S.O. to distinguish Black groups from others in the A.A. Directories, it is next to impossible to trace their growth in the intervening decades, nor to estimate the present number. They are obviously very strong in Northern Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Washington, D.C.; Atlanta, Georgia; and probably in most major cities with concentrations of Black population.

Young People

When A.A. was young, most of the members were not. The majority of those whose alcoholism had brought them to their knees were middle-aged. On the other hand, there has always been a sprinkling of younger alcoholics, who were regarded almost as curiosities; in fact, many of today's long-time members came in at a relatively youthful age -- or they wouldn't still be around! There were enough Young People in A.A. by 1950 that the First International Convention that year in Cleveland included a session for them! Then, as A.A. grew older in the '50's and '60's, more alcoholics began showing up in their early thirties, their twenties and even their teens.

There were several reasons for this trend. Awareness of alcoholism was much higher, so those with a problem sought help earlier. The stigma was steadily reduced. Drugs, as they became more available and more commonly used by young people, hastened their progression and ultimate desperation. Later on, treatment centers turned out large numbers of younger graduates. And here, as always in A.A., the principle that "like attracts like" applied. When a youthful alcoholic hesitantly approached a group for the first time and saw another youth, he or she was more likely to stay. And when a kid -- rejecting his family (or rejected by them) and running with a street crowd -- found acceptance, a new way of life and evident joy in A.A., his young alcoholic peers were sometimes attracted to see what had happened to him.

In 1985, one of the better known examples of A.A.'s ability to turn a young person's life around was the story of June G., who came to Alcoholics Anonymous in

Venice, California, in 1972 at the age of 13. The product of delinquent, violent, alcoholic parents June was pathologically suicidal as a child, and had been turned out onto the street before she had reached her teens because she had physically abused her mother as a result of her own drinking and drugging. Beaten up in a gang fight, the waif attempted suicide once more, and ended up in the hospital. From there, she was induced to go to an A.A. meeting. And she kept showing up, as she had nowhere else to go. "I hated the people there, and they avoided me," she says. Her appearance and dress, her language and her attitude were unacceptable. "It was a year before I put on shoes," June admits. But she kept coming, and gradually some of the adult members -- and particularly a caring sponsor -- took her under their wing. They virtually adopted her -- gave her a place to sleep, slowly changed the way she dressed, persuaded her to attend school, made her get some kind of work. June G. went on to high school, then the university, then law school -- and today practices as a public defender in the court system of the City of Los Angeles. A charming, lovely looking, smartly attired young lady of 26 (in 1985), June has 13 years of solid sobriety -- thanks to her only "family": Alcoholics Anonymous.

Typically, the path of most young people coming to A.A. was not without obstacles. Many in the '60's told how they were ignored or scorned by older members at regular A.A. groups. "You're too young to be an alcoholic," they were told. "Go out and do some more drinking." One speaker at a young people's A.A. convention said, "As I was leaving one of my first meetings, I overheard an older member remark, 'I've spilled more booze than that young punk has drunk' He probably had, but it was the alcohol I had drunk -- not what he spilled -- that made my life unmanageable.

And even when a regular group made them feel welcome, the young people sometimes felt different for the same reasons that nonalcoholic youngsters feel different from adults; they dressed differently, talked differently, and had different fears and hang-ups.

Some helpful insights into young people in A.A. were gained from a strictly unofficial study done in 1976 by Darlene L., a college student and A.A. member in Southern California, assisted by Jerry F., the then Delegate. The project consisted of distributing questionnaires addressed to "under 30" A.A.'s in that area. Darlene got 79 replies from which she drew her conclusions. The first discovery was that three out of four had a parent or other close relative who was an alcoholic (a much more startling fact in 1976 than today!). Many respondents had attended their first A.A. meeting as a child; in the company of a parent, so they knew where to come when they got into trouble themselves. The second

discovery was that the young persons' progression into serious alcoholism was very fast; within three years of beginning to drink regularly, they knew they had a problem. Similarly, the study revealed they realized their powerlessness over alcoholism very early, enabling them to overcome their denial syndrome. Most of the young alcoholics had also been drug users, greatly speeding up their reaching a bottom. And finally, when they came to A. A., most identified with the alcoholism of the older members but had problems arising out of their identity as young people.

So the younger members in various parts of the country began banding together in their own groups. The first known group "for men and women under 35" was formed in January 1946 in Philadelphia. Within a year, it had about 30 members and an admirable record of sobriety. The same year, in October, a similar group was started in San Diego, California, but for young men only. It was followed within months by a young women's group. In 1947, a "35 and under" group began in New York City "with a mere handful." But three years later, it had 75 to 100 alcoholics.

A September 1961 Grapevine article on these "Youth Groups" states, "In some places, naturally enough, (they) were started with high hopes and flood-tide energy, but little stable or wise leadership. Groups turned into social clubs, or other Traditions were broken, and groups died." But in the long run, most of the groups survived and became viable, because they filled a need. "One girl admitted, 'I guess we just rebel more at our age, even in A.A. groups. And here, I don't have to try to compare my drinking with that of fellows who reminisce about bathtub gin or speakeasies.' And another fellow said, 'My young people's group helps me with current problems. Because I'm young, I have lots of domestic, professional and other personal problems. Getting started in a career or starting a family are not problems most older members are now facing, so we younger ones can face them together and help one another. That's in addition to helping each other stay sober -- which always comes first.'"

Young people's groups were often regarded with suspicion by older groups. Not uncommonly, they were not included in the local service structure because they were "not A.A." But the youngsters continued doing their thing and gradually came to be not only accepted but admired. In the 1961 article, the Milwaukee A.A. Central Office secretary is quoted as saying, "These young people's groups are the lifesavers of A.A. in our area. The service workers under 35 are where we get most of our best volunteers who keep our Central Office functioning. They're the ones we can count on most to take on Twelfth Step jobs, institutional work and public information tasks."

The young people's groups -- along with young people from regular A.A. groups -- banded together in 1958 to form the International Conference of Young People in Alcoholics Anonymous, or ICYPAA (pronounced "Icky-Pa") for short. They held their first convention at Niagara Falls, New York, April 26-27, 1958. Less than a hundred people attended. The event has been held annually ever since in different cities from coast to coast, and the attendance now runs 3,000 or more, and are eagerly bid for by young A.A.'s in the host regions and eagerly sought by the convention bureaus of host cities.

Predictably, the large conventions and the existence of ICYPAA caused more controversy within conventional A.A. than the individual young people's groups. It was immediately accused of being some kind of non-affiliated splinter group. Older A.A.'s felt vaguely threatened. ICYPAA leaders kept insisting, "We're not a separate movement or a breaking-away from Alcoholics Anonymous. The Ninth Tradition says 'we may create service committees directly responsible to those they serve.' Our primary purpose is to carry the message to younger alcoholics."

The resistance from regular AA. groups has now generally disappeared. Trustees from the General Service Board (including its Chairman) now routinely and delightedly attend the annual ICYPAA conventions -- and sometimes the regional ones, too. Past members of young people's groups have become trusted servants, Delegates and even Trustees. (George D., past Pacific Regional Trustee, was a former member of the first young people's group in Los Angeles.) The Conventions are very large supporters of G.S.O. At the invitation of the General Service Board, ICYPAA leaders have attended a Board sharing session, and they gave extremely valuable assistance in arranging subjects to be interviewed and filmed for A.A.'s documentary film targeting young people. These are the future of A.A.

Seniors

Ironically, this influx of young people into the Fellowship has led older members of A.A. to form a number of groups and meetings for senior citizen alcoholics. The first of these is believed to be the Golden Years group started in North Hollywood, California, in 1978. "Teet" C., one of the founders, says they had seen older alcoholics "fall by the wayside because they felt they did not belong in large 'wide-open' A.A. meetings." He adds, however, that all newly sober elders are cautioned against making the Golden Years group their sole participation." Many of the members are long-timers with 25 to 40 years' sobriety, who try to help the newcomer break through his or her denial. In the last decade, many other "over-40", "sober seniors" or "golden years" groups have formed throughout the country. A.A. has recognized the special needs of the older alcoholic with the publication of

the pamphlet, "Time To Start Living", including a large-type edition. A.A. has exhibited at conventions of the American Association of Retired People, and the staff member on the CPC assignment has also attended.

Homosexual Alcoholics

Homosexual --i.e., gay and lesbian alcoholics have found help and recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous from its very early days. Bill W. refers to them in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and in a 1958 letter expresses deep sympathy and concern. The dedication and talents of gay and lesbian A.A. members have often led them into service, where they have contributed enormously in all capacities including Delegate and Trustee. Almost never overt in their lifestyle, they have been completely accepted.

In 1975, Lillen Fifiield published a study of alcohol abuse in the Los Angeles gay community entitled, "On My Way to Nowhere: Alienated, Isolated, Drunk." Its title suggested the author's theory to account for the high incidence of alcoholism among homosexuals -- which is reflected in the number of homosexual A.A.s in that city. The point was made that A.A. serves unique needs for gay and lesbian alcoholics over and above those of straight alcoholics. The former are frequently estranged from their families at an early age, and hence feel rejected, lonely and "different" -- which makes them especially vulnerable to alcoholism. Add to this that their social life usually revolves around gay bars, partying and drinking. When they reach their bottom and come to A.A., they find in recovery not only a new way of life and new values, but also an acceptance and, indeed, a new "family" they have never had before.

Therefore, in large cities with a significant homosexual population -- New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, Boston - gays and lesbians came to A.A. as early as the 1940's and in increasing numbers ever since. Going back to the late '40's and more noticeably in the '50's and '60's, there were groups in certain neighborhoods such as Greenwich Village and the East Side of Manhattan in New York, and downtown San Francisco, which were primarily composed of gay people, though they were not listed or designated as gay groups. "We were getting along fine," recalls a gay A.A. member in San Francisco, "with plenty of gay people getting sober in groups downtown or Marin or East Bay which were predominantly gay but also had a rich diversity of people."

However, although the gays identified with the drinking and the feelings of straight A. A. 's, they sometimes had difficulty being comfortable or openly sharing their experiences and problems. And so, in San Francisco in about 1967, some people felt they wanted a group which was exclusively gay. It is recalled that

there was considerable debate and controversy within the gay A.A. community whether or not to do it, but it was finally decided to give it a try downtown at the Episcopal Church on Fell Street. At first, the members identified themselves with names and "I'm a gay alcoholic." Shortly, however, most of them dropped saying "gay" and said simply, "I'm an alcoholic." "We regarded this just as a place where homosexual alcoholics could come who were intimidated in coming to a straight A.A. group," a founder says. "We had no idea of creating something in which people would come in and get sober and spend their entire A.A. life. But that's what's happened, and if we hadn't done it, someone else would.

And someone else was indeed doing it in other cities. In Washington, D.C., for example, four alcoholics - two gay and two lesbian - gathered for a meeting in a private home on December 8, 1971. All of them found an exclusively homosexual group extremely helpful. They continued meeting on Sundays at two homes in nearby Virginia until the summer of 1972, when Cade W. and Bob W approached Fr. Goodrich of St. James Episcopal Church and requested meeting space. He gave his permission. A later pastor said, "If it had gone to the Vestry Council, it would have been turned down." Soon a Wednesday Step meeting was added to the Sunday meeting at St. James. Besides Cade and Bob, early members included Blanche M., Gerry Kay T., Tom H., Ray C., Vern W., Barbara C., Nancy T. and Dennis L.

In early 1974, Ray C. started the St. Margaret's open speaker meeting on Friday evenings. The Lambda group in Virginia followed on Saturday nights. A Big Book meeting began at St. Thomas in late '75, and the Montrose group began a month later. A.A. groups for gays continued to grow and in 1985 Washington, Maryland and Virginia had 15 groups with about 40 meetings a week.

As similar patterns of growth occurred in other cities, and A.A. groups for gays began to appear in other locations, the need was felt for a directory of gay/lesbian groups. (Since 1974, they were listed, without special designation, in A.A.'s Directories for U.S./Canada, by Conference action.) For this purpose as well as to provide a contact point for homosexual alcoholics, the International Advisory Council for Homosexual Men and Women in Alcoholics Anonymous was organized. They also publish a helpful pamphlet. The Council is listed in the front of the A.A. Directories, along with contacts for other special composition groups, and the Council has worked with G.S.O. to help provide workshops and social events for gay/lesbian A.A.'s at International Conventions since 1980. However, gay members in other cities are quick to point out that the Council does not speak for all gay A.A.'s, nor is it responsible to them. "Some of us out here," says a member in San Francisco, "are a little nervous and a little resentful at the recognition given to this particular bunch."

The question of listing groups for homosexuals raged in Los Angeles (and some other localities) long after the Conference had decided it at the national level. The problem in Southern California was due not only to the large number of such groups, but it was further complicated by the existence of a whole coterie of groups for gays who called themselves "Alcoholics Together." They pressured the Los Angeles Central Office to list them in the local meeting directory. Actually, however, "Alcoholics Together" were religious in origin and, though they patterned themselves after all aspects of the A.A. program, they were not A.A. -- which finally settled the issue.

In 1975, an ad hoc group of gay A.A. 's in Northern California decided they would put on an A.A. round-up. A gay member who tried to help them says the trouble was, none of the Sponsoring group had more than two years' sobriety. "They made a lot of mistakes, including putting out a flyer that was carefully designed to offend almost everybody, without their realizing they were offending anybody." Howls of protest were heard as far as the G.S.O. in New York, and the local Delegate was asked to meet with them and try to straighten them out. Subsequently, a second flyer was produced, and when it was shown to staff member Cora Louise B. during the Conference, she remarked, "My, this is as proper and decorous as an invitation to a coming-out party in Greenville, Mississippi!"

That first round-up in 1976 was a great success, with about 200 in attendance from as far away as Vancouver, British Columbia, and Los Angeles. They immediately wanted to go home and have a similar event of their own and so the idea spread. The format of the ICYPAA conferences was followed in many cases. Criticism has been heard that the largest of these round-ups in New York and San Francisco, drawing around 2,000 people, have gotten far afield from A.A. in their workshops. But other recent local gatherings of gay A.A.'s have been "pure, basic A.A. -- absolutely marvelous!" according to one discriminating member.

Doctors in A.A.

Bill W. courted the favor of doctors toward Alcoholics Anonymous. He considered medical recognition of alcoholism as a disease to be critical to A.A.'s future, and he valued doctors as a resource to reach the still-suffering alcoholic and refer him to A.A. However, though the co-founder was a doctor and another doctor's personal story was included in the first edition of the Big Book, it was not fully recognized that doctors had a more direct relationship with A.A. as recovered drunks. Doctors are statistically more prone to alcoholism than any other profession; yet they are less prone to recognize their problem or accept help from anyone other than another doctor.

It was the late Dr. C.P., of Cape Vincent, New York, who, after Joining Alcoholics Anonymous in 1946, realized that doctors in A.A. needed to band together to help other doctors. The first meeting of ten doctors was held in the garage of Dr. Clarence P. in Clayton, New York, in 1947. As three of them were Canadians, they were "International" from the beginning. Clarence then issued an invitation through the Grapevine, which resulted in a gathering of 25 doctors from all over, in late summer 1949. Those present agreed that an annual gathering, held in different parts of the U.S./Canada, would be a desirable addition to their attendance at local A.A. meetings the rest of the year.

The annual meetings have been held the first weekend in August every year since, at various locations including Chicago, Denver, San Antonio, San Diego, Toronto, New York, etc., etc. Guest speakers, in and out of A.A., representing fields connected with alcoholism, are featured, with plenty of time for regular A.A. sharing. There are no dues, but a modest registration fee at the annual meeting covers expenses of the meeting, postage for the year, and a contribution to G.S.O.

The International Doctors in A.A., as they call themselves, have upwards of 2,000 on their confidential mailing list -- including names in Australia, New Zealand, South America, South Africa, Japan, etc. All are assumed to be active in their local A.A. groups as well. The IDAA itself is organized loosely like an A.A. group, with a Secretary-Treasurer who maintains the mailing list, corresponds with newcomers, and circulates newsletters periodically. Dr. Lewis "Luke" R., of Youngstown, Ohio, has had the position through most of IDAA's existence. Regional meetings and groups, organized by local A.A. doctors, have also been successful and well attended. The majority of IDAA members are medical doctors -- physicians, surgeons, psychiatrists, etc. The membership also includes dentists, psychologists, veterinarians and medical scientists such as biochemists and microbiologists. "Through our association with this group," states Dr. "Luke" R, "we hope to better cope with and understand our own problems, the problems of other doctors, and most certainly the problems of our patients."

Lawyers in A.A.

Admittedly indebted to the International Doctors in A.A. for advice and inspiration, a number of lawyers in A.A., led by Igor S. of Hartford, Connecticut, founded the International Lawyers in A.A. at a meeting in Niagara Falls, Ontario, in September 1975. Twenty lawyers were present, 16 from Canada and four from the U.S.

They met in September of the next year in Buffalo, New York, at what they called their second annual convention. Again, about 20 were present. The conventions have continued ever since.

They shared their drinking experiences and identified strongly with their common difficulties in the practice of law when drinking alcoholically. They widened their focus to discuss when and under what circumstances they should divulge their A.A. membership, and how best to extend a hand to colleagues or clients in trouble with booze. They concluded they were in a position to carry the A.A. message effectively without risking their professional reputations or practices. Like IDAA, the ILAA viewed themselves not as a special-purpose group, but rather as a supplement to attendance at regular A.A. meetings and a "vestibule" for lawyers with a drinking problem to meet with other lawyers before entering mainstream A.A.

Igor S. says, "ILAA emphatically does not seek to form a separatist or elitist group. Instead, it serves as a sharing community, demonstrating to the frightened, guilt-laden lawyer that he is not alone."

Concurrently with the founding of International Lawyers in A.A., state bar associations began to set up procedures to identify alcoholism or drug abuse in the profession and to provide help. Local lawyer's groups were able to assist by offering their experience, strength and hope to those in trouble.

Airline Pilots in A.A.: "Birds of a Feather"

With airline pilots, an alcohol problem had large and terrifying dimensions. If they were discovered, even in recovery they would lose their jobs, under FAA regulations. They had no secure place to go to attend A.A. meetings. "We had a constant, gut-wrenching, sweat producing fear of being found out -- even after treatment," says one pilot in A.A.

The first discussion of the special needs of alcoholic airline personnel for treatment and subsequent recovery in A.A. was held in the early summer of 1975 between Mike M., an airline dispatcher at the Seattle-Tacoma (SEA-TAC) airport, and Larry Haynie, then director of the Alcoholism Treatment Center at Puget Sound Hospital in Tacoma. Mike had also been discussing with Ward B., a pilot, the need for an airmen-only A.A. meeting, so he was drawn into a second appointment with Haynie. These three are considered the co-founders of what came to be called "Birds of a Feather" (BOAF). The first organized group meeting was held Friday, December 5, 1975, in a conference room at Puget Sound Hospital.

It soon included Rudy D., who vigorously championed the need for a secret, protective meeting. His airline had just announced that they had no alcoholic pilots, because if they found one, they would fire him. Al J. also became an active organizer and contact for the "Birds."

From that modest beginning, BOAF grew to about 90 names throughout the world. Their meetings, which they call "nests," are held usually at or near airports in Atlanta, Washington, Denver, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, La Jolla, Seattle, Burlingame and Morristown, N.J. In June 1981, the formation of a "nest" at Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, made the "Birds" truly international, in addition to "solo" members in Ireland, Germany, Iceland and India. Membership has broadened to include other licensed cockpit crew besides pilots. Birds of a Feather meetings are simply closed A.A. meetings at which the strictest anonymity is observed. They are registered at G.S.O., but are not listed in any A.A. Directories (except for the address of the national contact) or local Intergroup meeting lists.

In 1978 the need was recognized for a national BOAF body to coordinate the meetings and serve as a communications link. John R. was appointed its first secretary, followed by Chuck C., Al J., Pat W., Grant B. and Ron D. A newsletter, the "Bird Word," is circulated periodically. In December 1982, Renton, Washington, hosted the first international convention of the Birds, followed by Atlanta and Chicago. In addition, every December 7, the Washington, D.C., "nest" hosts a "Pearl Harbor Day" meeting attended by several hundred ex-airmen from the military as well as current pilots. The Pearl Harbor day meeting pre-dates BOAF by many years and has none of its secrecy.

Other Special Composition Groups

The hearing impaired may be more susceptible to alcoholism than hearing people because of their isolation and sense of being "different." And their recovery in A.A. is hampered by the difficulty of communicating. Long recognizing this need, A.A. has attempted to serve the hearing impaired through the group services assignment at G.S.O. The first Deaf group, apparently, was started in Los Angeles in March 1962, with as many as 18 in attendance -- but attendance dwindled and the group was inactivated in 1981. Meanwhile, the Eye Opener group for the hearing impaired was formed in Washington, D.C., in 1970, and the Sign of Hope group in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1981. In 1985, G.S.O. listed about 100 groups and contacts throughout the country.

The exclusively Deaf groups have tended to lose members to regular A.A. groups which have increasingly tried to provide an interpreter who can "sign" for hearing

impaired members when needed. Signing for the deaf is now provided at all International Conventions and many other A.A. gatherings as well.

Indian (or Native American, in the modern terminology) groups have existed. They are essentially de facto Indian because they meet on or near reservations, but they also provide powerful identification for the Native American newcomer and recognize cultural differences. The first all Indian group in the U.S. is believed to be the Oneida, Wisconsin, group started in 1953; it is now known as the Hobart group. A letter from Hazel R. at G.S.O. in 1966 says there are 20 Indian groups in the U.S. and 11 in Canada. The number was probably nearer 100 by 1985.

Still other groups are composed of A.A.'s who speak languages other than English. There were many Spanish-speaking groups in the U.S./Canada in 1985. They have formed their own Intergroups in cities with large Hispanic population, and they held their first "Convention Nacional A.A. de Habla Hispana" in 1972. It has been held annually ever since, rotating among various locales, and draws about 1,000 attendees.

Similarly, there are a large number of French-speaking groups, centered mainly in Quebec, Canada. A huge annual convention held in Montreal is billed as the Bi-Lingual, but its attendance is probably 80 percent from French-speaking groups.

Still other groups organized on the basis of language include Polish-, Finnish-, Italian-, Korean- and Vietnamese-speaking. "

(From AAHistoryLovers On-Line Discussion)

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In-service,

Stan L.

Deputy Chair

International Advisory Council for Homosexual men and women in Alcoholics Anonymous.