

**FOURTH  
INTERNATIONAL  
AL-ANON  
GENERAL SERVICES  
MEETING**

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***Theme:***  
***Working Together in Service***

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**SEPTEMBER 12-16, 1986  
STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT**

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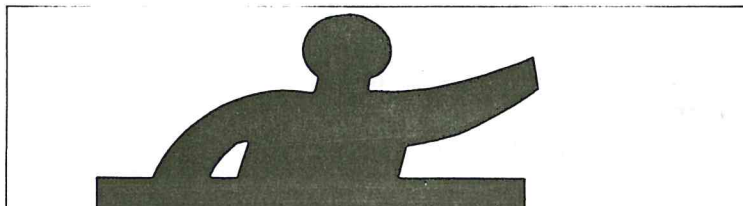
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# OPENING SESSION



## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of the General Services Meeting is to share the experience of Al-Anon national services around the world through their Delegates. It will attempt to encourage the growth of a sound service structure while maintaining worldwide unity through the application of Al-Anon Traditions. It can also represent an expression of a worldwide group conscience.

Ultimately, this leads to the primary purpose of Al-Anon as a whole—to seek the best way to carry the Al-Anon message of recovery to families and friends of alcoholics amidst cultural and language differences.

## WELCOME:

**Myrna H., WSO**  
**General Secretary**

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to the First General Services Meeting, now no longer held on a trial basis. I hope you enjoyed yourselves during your visit to Stepping Stones this afternoon. The welcome you received there was only the beginning of the kind of hospitality and serenity we hope you will experience this weekend.

In order to remember the structures unable to send Delegates, the following letter was read:

*My dear Friends in Al-Anon,*

*As the date of the IAGSM draws closer, my mind goes back to the two times I was*

*privileged to share the wonderful experience of meeting with members of this beloved fellowship from all over the world. I remember how much love was present and how honest and open the sharings were. We proved that our Preamble, which says that we share our experience, strength and hope with one another, is no idle promise. Not only did we share our personal needs with one another, but also those of our respective countries. For us in South Africa, it was a most rewarding time. We have most certainly benefited from the experience. Unfortunately, we are unable to send any Delegates this time. Our country is sadly in distress and so just for now, we feel that our energies and finances must be concentrated on the needs of all our people here who are suffering through their association with this sad and soul-destroying illness.*

*I wish you all a most blessed time together and know that we who are unable to be physically present will surely continue to benefit from your sharings. I send my love in the true Al-Anon way to each and everyone; those of you I met before and those I may never meet. It matters not whether we ever meet. We are one family bound by the healing fellowship of Al-Anon and held together by the Power greater than ourselves as manifested by our group conscience—we are all responsible for that. I will think of you during your workshops. I will visit Stepping Stones with you. I will feel Lois' warmth as you greet her. I will not be able to visualize your visit to the WSO offices as they have moved since I was there. Above all, I will share your apprehension, excitement and joy as you share those days. May the God of your understanding be with you all and may you feel His love as you share this lovely time.*

*With love,  
Evelyn M.*



**"The solutions to our problems seldom come from our head; they burst forth from our heart."** (*Rose M., International Coordination Committee Chairman*)

## INVOCATION

God, thank you for bringing each of us safely to Connecticut. This meeting is just another part of our spiritual journey. Why each of us here has been chosen to serve the fellowship out of the thousands of members we will not question—nor will we let the clouds of doubt fill our minds as to how adequately we can accomplish the best for Al-Anon as a whole. We just need your guidance.

In the next three days, we will say and listen to the Serenity Prayer in ten languages. Even though these words will differ, our petition for your help is the same as we say:

*God grant me the serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

## KEYNOTE SPEECH

**Marina H.,  
Delegate from Brazil**

This morning you are looking at a woman who stands again at a crossroad, but I'm not afraid. It's a fresh and exciting challenge.

Five years ago when I joined Al-Anon, I also stood at a crossroad and I was frightened. With the help of Al-Anon and others working together in service, I found the right path and moved forward with confidence. Now, crossroads no longer can terrify me.

Born and raised in Sao Paulo, Brazil, I was the middle one of three sisters and later a brother. Our parents continually opened doors to life and the world beyond for us. We lost our father and brother suddenly while I was still in college and from then on, it was

mother and three girls at a crossroad challenge which we met with difficulty.

I soon accepted a position to be part of an experiment in international living as a third grade teacher in an American public school. During that awesome year, I met the reason for my subsequent Al-Anon association. Four years later, he came to Brazil for a visit with me and my family, and we returned to the U.S. to be married. When he retired five years later, we came back to Brazil to live. I'd done graduate work in adult and continuing education in the U.S. and so was able to take advantage of a very attractive job offer in Sao Paulo.

I'd heard of Al-Anon through a Brazilian friend who lived in the U.S. Little did I know that I, too, would be destined to take the same Al-Anon road. Yet looking back today, it is easy to see that the Higher Power was already working on my behalf.

Gradually, my husband's drinking pattern changed and I sensed his unhappiness with himself and his inability to cope with the day-to-day challenges of life without a steady and increasing intake of alcohol. I was desperate and seriously looked for outside help—another crossroad. Here I was with an American husband who could not speak Portuguese and living in a Portuguese-speaking country. How on earth could he—we—find help?

I reached out and found an English-speaking AA group right in the middle of Sao Paulo. The Higher Power helping me! What a marvelous revelation to meet and talk to some of the members in that group.

I located an Al-Anon group and met a member whose warm welcome made me want to continue. She is still my closest of friends. I joined Al-Anon without reservation and knew I was finally in the right place. I could talk about my feelings, be understood and feel the strength of Al-Anon. It had the ability to comfort and to give hope and it was hope I badly needed. I felt I had to find a positive and constructive path. From the feeling of despair, I could see other roads beckoning. The crossroad began to lose its terror.

I decided to redirect my life and to concentrate on two main areas; my work and a study of alcoholism, Al-Anon and AA. I began to attend every type of meeting that I could—both Al-Anon and AA.



Early in the program, my friend and I attended a national Al-Anon meeting in Sao Paulo and profited greatly from it. I listened to many people whose lives almost had been destroyed. I, who was feeling at the bottom, suddenly realized that I still had a good job. My husband had never been the violent type. I still had my home and the support of my family. I could read English and had access to a wide variety of literature in English.

Later, I attended a Literature Committee Workshop. They described what was involved in translating and publishing our Conference-Approved Literature into Portuguese. I volunteered to work with them and began translating some pieces. This is how I started "Working Together In Service" in Al-Anon.

As the result of regular meetings and the help of my two good Al-Anon friends, I was learning gradually how to serve my husband by better serving myself. Throughout this critical time, we never lost respect for one another. Many other people I met, who knew nothing about alcoholism, would say, "Why don't you separate?" "He is too old for you." "You deserve someone better." However, I always knew I loved him and if the situation were reversed, if I were the sick one, would I appreciate being abandoned? If ever I would need to come to this kind of decision, it would be ONLY and AFTER I tried to help him and us.

My two friends helped me to clear up these thoughts and supported my decisions. Also, I found that I was turning more of my life over to the will of the Higher Power. Without this, I do not know where I would be today. I reviewed my values and did a lot of meditation.

In August 1981, my husband had his turning point and needed to receive treatment. I was able to place him in a private clinic near Sao Paulo. For the next ten days, I could not sleep. Only my Al-Anon friends, the meetings, and my family were able to help me through.

Al-Anon then became my second home. My two friends and I became more involved in service and gradually built a team to work on behalf of the structure of Al-Anon.

Working together in service definitely requires teamwork and somehow the three of us worked together beautifully and were soon known as the "trio" of Sao Paulo. This is no longer. The Al-Anon program is very wise when it recommends the continual turnover of offices.

With the help and orientation of veteran Al-Anon members, we gradually set up the financial structure, methods for the sale of literature, monthly meetings with Information Service Representatives and much more. We saw the need to reach out to the interior of the state and thus the Area was subdivided into Districts, which helped stimulate the growth of Al-Anon statewide. We traveled to all these places and had first-hand contact with Al-Anon members. We saw what their concerns were and were better able to represent the membership. I could take to the Conference their concerns and bring back to them some answers and a better orientation. Those were very busy years, working the 12th Step all the way. What really made it all possible was the friendship, trust and cooperation established while working together in service, sharing something with others.

Easter of 1983 was the date of our Third Al-Anon/Alateen and AA Area Convention. I was Chairman of the Coordinating Committee and along with a group of volunteers and my good Al-Anon friends, was able to build enthusiasm. We established a very positive working relationship with AA members who, until then, had the idea that Al-Anon meetings were places where their wives could go to gossip about them!

This was an Area project and had to be worked out with participation of members from each District. It was hard work, but proved also to be lots of fun. The level of motivation was high and the enthusiasm was magnetic. *Working Together in Service* with the help of the Higher Power was wonderful.

Gradually, I left Area service and became more involved with our national service. It proved to be different. I did not have as much contact with Al-Anon members as I had as Area Delegate. I was also working

full time with little time for meetings and travel.

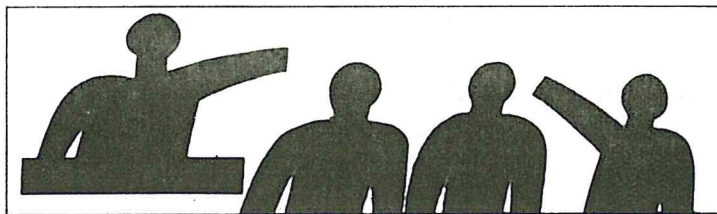
This is my second IAGSM. I took back many answers to Brazil in 1984 and this year have brought an even bigger batch of questions. Each meeting is special and I know this one will be as wonderful as the last. So here I am, many challenging and rewarding experiences later. Lately, I have found myself slowing down in my Al-Anon participation and service. I fear that "my light is going out." My professional life has also begun to drag and last July I decided to leave my position to take time out to rest, relax, renew my contacts with life and to

review my directions. I am, in truth, again at a crossroad. A new challenge, but this time I am not alone and am armed with my past experiences with Al-Anon.

I am reapplying the Third Step now: "To turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understand Him." I am certain that my being here today is part of "thy will be done" and that I will gain new insights from our meetings this week. It is my sincere and earnest desire that you too profit from our brief time of working and serving together. Whatever new course my life takes from this point, rest assured the spirit, the program, the guiding principles of Al-Anon will go with me.



# GENERAL SESSION



**"It is more important that we understand each other than that we always agree." (Rose M., International Coordination Committee Chairman)**

## VOTING PROCEDURES

**Mary Ann K., International  
Coordination Secretary**

Before getting into the actual mechanics of the voting procedures, the Delegates were invited to review the Concepts. According to the introduction to Al-Anon's Twelve Concepts of Service, they are to be a reliable working guide. "The spiritual foundation for Al-Anon's World Service is contained in the General Warranties."\*

The Third Warranty of the Concepts states, "That all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote and whenever possible, by substantial unanimity."\* And substantial unanimity can be defined as a large majority.

The voting procedures at this meeting would reflect these words. Taking time to clearly understand the voting process is as important as any votes taken. If the Concepts can be put into action, the meeting would succeed in both practical and spiritual terms.

"The voting procedures serve as a safeguard against any hasty or overbearing authority of a simple majority and takes notice of the rights and the frequent wisdom of minorities. This principle further guarantees that all matters of importance will be extensively debated, until a really heavy majority can support every critical decision the group is called upon to make."\*

It was suggested that substantial unanimity be clearly defined for this meeting

before any emotional or practical issues arose. If an important issue passes by a small majority, the disunity it causes will outweigh any of the benefits it may contain.

With 35 voting members, the IAGSM agreed that 24 votes (roughly  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the voting members) would be the minimum indication of substantial unanimity. By a consensus of the voting members, it was agreed all votes be decided by a show of hands rather than by closed ballot.

### How an idea is voted on:

- A Delegate or Planning Committee member writes out a Motion.
- The Motion is made at the mike.
- The Chairman asks for a second.
- The Chairman gives the Motion to the motion recorder to read.
- The Chairman asks for discussion from the floor. This is our opportunity to discuss each issue at length.

The first Motion made was *that the number of voting Planning Committee members at the IAGSM never exceed  $\frac{1}{3}$  the number of Delegates*. It passed unanimously. The discussion that preceded the vote included the following points:

- The increase in the number of voting members of the Planning Committee from 4 to 6 was suggested as a reflection of the increase in the number of IAGSM Delegates. The concern that international thinking would be overshadowed by additional WSO representation was expressed. The importance of involving volunteers in this service was indicated. It was felt that adding several volunteer members to the Committee would broaden the group conscience of the four

\*Al-Anon's Twelve Concepts of Service



WSO members. (Myrna H., Sandy F., Mary Ann K. and Margaret O'B.)

- The Planning Committee does not simply plan the IAGSM; it discusses issues of an international nature and makes recommendations to the Board of Trustees during the two years between meetings. It is important that volunteer members of the Planning Committee not be limited from voting on these other international issues, such as policy, financial concerns, and other matters. Long-term members can broaden the group conscience of the four World Service Office staff.

As trusted servants of Al-Anon, we want to lead by example today as well as when we go home. If we have within our meeting a democratic procedure, then we will safeguard the freedom given in Al-Anon and it will be passed onto others.

## ROLE OF THE GSO

### *Olga T., Delegate from Mexico*

More than a business office for 1,518 Al-Anon groups in our country, the Mexican GSO is a vital service center dedicated to helping relatives and friends of alcoholics. Created at the First National Assembly in 1973, it is now called "Central Mexicana de Servicios Generales de los Grupos Familiares Al-Anon, A.C." better known as General Service Office. (OSG by its Spanish initials)

Today this office is responsible for all services given to 118 Alateen, 144 Young Al-Anon and 1,256 Al-Anon Groups. It also gives information to people seeking help from Al-Anon.

#### **Services provided to the groups are:**

- Registering new groups and individuals, and sending them free literature.
- Informing Area Committees about groups' formation or dissolution in their Areas.

- Informing the WSO about groups' formation, dissolution or changes in our country.
- Keeping all information about the groups up-to-date in order to edit a yearly National Directory (confidential) and distributing it to all Al-Anon, Alateen groups and Loners.
- Keeping in touch with members and answer all letters according to fellowship principles.
- Sending the WSO Spanish translations of English publications and after permission is granted, reprint and distribute CAL.
- Registering Literature Coordinators and Information Services and provide them with literature and support.
- Distributing CAL either directly to members and groups without discount or through Literature Area Coordinators with 10 or 20 percent discount.
- Reprinting and distributing guidelines, two newsletters and one bulletin.
- Reprinting and distributing supplementary material, including 18 follow-up guides for all new groups and members who request them.
- Leading efforts of National P.I. and creating cooperation between Al-Anon and the professional community; bringing the Al-Anon message to Institutions and encouraging the formation of Institutional Groups.
- Guiding Areas with structural development, establishing Area Committees and encouraging them in service via Regional Service Seminars, to begin in 1987.
- Organizing and preserving all historical Al-Anon materials past and present.
- Working with AA's GSO in all special situations which could affect both fellowships.

#### **Events Planned by the GSO:**

- Arrange a yearly National Conference

and send a summary to all groups in the country.

- Coordinate a yearly National Simultaneous Congress, created to commemorate the Al-Anon GSO Anniversary.
- Every three years, organize an ex-Delegate National Meeting to profit from the service experience of participants.
- Every three months, inform the Board of Trustees about activities.

The General Service Office comprises eight paid employees, some volunteers and a mimeograph machine called, "little drunk."

## ROLE OF THE GSO

***Sheila A., Delegate  
from the U.K. & Eire***

Our GSO is not in command over members, groups or service arms. It is simply an administrative center. The paid staff and volunteers are members of Al-Anon/Alateen and thus bring to their work those experiences gained in practicing our Twelve Steps and Traditions. We also hold an Al-Anon meeting in the office once a week. Staff, volunteers and walk-ins attend which helps create an atmosphere of warmth and understanding.

**GSO has many duties, among which are:**

- Providing continuing services for both new and old groups and serve as a focal point for the membership.
- Supplying information on Al-Anon/Alateen to those who ask for help.
- Encouraging ongoing communication with the groups and ensure accuracy of group listings.
- Coordinating and instigating Public Information work on a national level.
- Stocks literature and acts as a distribution center, reprinting CAL with WSO permission; publishes some P.I. literature,

meeting lists and service material; helps guard the international copyright of our literature.

On receiving an inquiry from members who wish to start a new Al-Anon group, we send them a letter of welcome telling them which District they will be joining, and the name and telephone number of their District Representative. For an Alateen group, we also give the name of their District Alateen Coordinator. We send notification of the inquiry to the DR and Alateen Coordinator if appropriate. Enclosed with this letter, we send a copy of Al-Anon/Alateen Guidelines and a new group registration form. When the form is returned, we send an acknowledging letter of encouragement and a "starter pack" of literature. To help the group feel part of our fellowship, we send them a free copy of our monthly newsletter, *NEWS AND VIEWS*, for the next three months.

We then set our records, prepare a group file, make up a group record card, add the new group to our master index, prepare a mailing address and put a pin on our map indicating location of the group. It is only by registering a group at the GSO and in turn the GSO registering them with the WSO that we link them to our fellowship worldwide.

Our structure has grown over the past 26 years; all the records were moved from members' homes into a central office in 1970. This means everything is now in one place. The office is an integral part of our structure with our address and telephone number published throughout the country.

It is most important that the need for efficiency in operating the GSO does not become a greater priority than remembering why we are there. We feel that taking "distressed calls" at our GSO helps us maintain warmth and understanding. We try to create a welcoming atmosphere so members will feel confident of a caring reception whatever their query. To help build this relationship is where efficiency is important; speedy responses to letters, orders for literature and good records so that group queries can be dealt with promptly.



Communication is vital. Every second month we send each group items of general interest, such as any new literature, *INSIDE AL-ANON*, *ALATEEN TALK* (to Alateen groups) and service information.

Once a year each group receives a copy of both the World Service Conference Summary and the U.K. & Eire Conference Summary. A volunteer regularly checks our group files and if we have had no response to our annual record check, correspondence or literature orders within the past two years, we write to the DR asking them if all is well with the group.

Communication is two-way; we receive copies of the minutes of District meetings. In reading these, staff keeps in touch with events happening in our groups and Districts. Occasionally, for example, when a District is discussing a problem they cannot resolve, we will write to the DR sending a copy of the letter to the Regional Trustee and suggest they contact another District with similar experiences to share. In this way, we can all help each other.

The GSO is represented at our annual Service Conference by the Chairman of the Executive Committee, the General Secretary and a staff member. In addition to the benefits of meeting and talking to DRs, who are our Conference Delegates, it is also an opportunity to discuss service matters with the Chairmen of those Standing Committees located in other parts of the country.

We have recently introduced holding an Open Day at our GSO. We invite our membership to come and see their office and meet the volunteers and staff.

One of the exciting new developments is participating in Regional Service Seminars (RSS) which provides an opportunity to explain the role of the GSO in our structure. The questions we have been asked show that members who live many miles away from the GSO sometimes misunderstand its role. This kind of personal interaction has been helpful in eliminating misunderstandings. Already we are aware of increased communication from members in the two regions where seminars have been held.

Each year, we send to the WSO a copy of

our directory of meeting places. It is corrected by crossing off any groups that have disbanded since publication. We also enclose copies of registration forms for any new group formed in the same period. We hope to regularly update this list throughout the year.

This simple system provides the WSO with an accurate list of all groups in the U.K. & Eire as an emergency mailing list, should the need ever arise. Our meeting list is never normally used for mailing purposes, but as the usual mailing addresses change more frequently than meeting places, it is difficult to keep these up-to-date for the WSO records. All normal mailings from the WSO to groups in the U.K. & Eire are forwarded by our GSO.

An effective GSO spreads the love and warmth of our program and strengthens the foundations of Al-Anon and Alateen, forming a link with our fellowship worldwide.

## DISCUSSION

- The WSO tries to reduce the amount of clerical work for each office in terms of mailings. An emergency address is needed so that should any emergency arise (e.g., the earthquake in Mexico), the WSO can serve as a clearinghouse. The use of meeting lists is not an attempt by the WSO to "go over the GSOs' heads," but to keep the computer lists more accurate and to maintain an emergency contact. If the GSOs want any changes in the way the WSO list is kept, the WSO would welcome any suggestions.
- The appeal letter goes overseas once a year (it is sent three times each year in the U.S. & Canada). The WSO's aim is to go through each GSO for these appeals, rather than contacting individual groups. This helps underscore the GSOs' credibility, support and stability. Then the GSO can consolidate individual groups' contributions and send them to the WSO as a single donation (in the local currency if necessary). Occasionally, appeal letters do get sent directly to individual groups,



but that is mainly because the groups are bilingual or order English literature. The intention is not to bypass the GSO; it is simply a function of the computer.

- Local currency is accepted for the appeal contribution, but not for literature orders. A solution to currency problems might be for the GSOs to perform various services that would relieve the WSO of additional financial burdens, specifically, to register Al-Anon trademarks in each country—Al-Anon, Alateen and the logo. The WSO is researching the question with an attorney and the Board; it is hoped that the GSOs in different countries would take financial responsibility for trademark registration and by doing so they would be making a sizable contribution.
- The GSOs have a variety of operating schedules. Open Monday through Friday are: the WSO, U.K. & Eire, Brazil, Finland, Germany, Mexico and Argentina. Australia and France are open three days a week. Switzerland, Italy and Norway are open evenings only. Iceland is open for several hours on Saturdays. Denmark's GSO is in a private home and is open whenever the Delegate is available.
- "Distressed calls" are handled in some countries at the GSO. Others have a tape machine which may provide another phone number or may actually forward the call to a member. A private home phone can be a problem because it is difficult to man the phone 24 hours a day. Delegates who have used this method, however, noted that despite the occasional intrusiveness of the calls, the experience can be constructive.

## CARRYING THE MESSAGE

**Sandy F., WSO**  
**Deputy General Secretary**

"When I needed it," Sandy said, "I didn't know about the Al-Anon program. I knew

about AA, but not Al-Anon. When I went with my husband to AA, fortunately, there were Al-Anon members there who later took me to Al-Anon."

The new film entitled, *Al-Anon Speaks For Itself*, was created to help carry the message to enable others to know about our program when they need it. The film was shown and a video in the frequency of each country was provided for each structure along with a copy of the script for translation.

The film's objective was to be as universal as possible, but each country has its own special circumstances. Still, all our problems are essentially similar, particularly with regard to educating our own membership about what Public Information actually is. The Delegates were invited to share their experiences with P.I. work; what projects have been undertaken and any questions regarding P.I. in general.

## COMMENTS

- Our P.I. consists of one National Committee and smaller committees or a single individual on the District level. The local representative may not actually do any P.I. work, but just provide a link with the National Committee. A problem we have is that most of our members have full-time jobs and cannot do P.I. work when it is most valuable—during the day. Another problem is that many members are not brave enough to do P.I. work; it is a small country and we are protective of our anonymity.
- We have information teams in different areas working with AA. Professionals help us do our work. We also have a problem with much of our membership working full time.
- We have P.I. and Institutions Standing Committees at our GSO who publish a joint bulletin. Ideas are communicated to areas via subcommittees and are also generated from the Conference. Our P.I. work is thus coordinated at all levels from the GSO to Area Committees, District Committees working with GRs and alternate GRs.

- We have lots of P.I. basic work yet to be done. We must explain that we are not AA and then describe what Al-Anon is. This year AA celebrated its 25th anniversary and we used our slides on a TV presentation. We have radio spots and a list of people who are willing to give talks. Members are encouraged at workshops to get involved in P.I. and ideas are exchanged on how to improve techniques and alleviate nervousness. The press is also used and we like to follow up articles with "thank you" letters.
- Our P.I. Committee is like a Coordinating Committee; channeling information, initiating new projects like radio spots, representing the fellowship at seminars and providing literature.
- We also have P.I. teams. Each District has smaller P.I. teams and each team has P.I. information and instructions. They deal with radio stations and newspapers, visit schools (and may do a program like a TV talk show), hang up posters in youth hostels, doctors' offices and churches.
- We still ride on AA's coattails, but it's better than not doing anything at all. We were at AA's 25th anniversary with a whole day set aside for the media and professionals. There was lots of coverage and we gave out kits and literature. We have an active committee, but national approval is required for their work. Sometimes there is too much enthusiasm at the local level.
- We need national direction for our P.I. work. We, too, have experience with too much enthusiasm at the local level. It would be good if we could "train" members to carry out effective P.I. work. Our efforts are still quite scattered and not really planned. On TV there was a taped show focusing on alcoholism. Al-Anon information was also broadcast and there were literally thousands of phone calls as a result. We also arranged for our phone

listing to be included in one Area's phone book in the emergency section, along with fire, police and medical numbers.

- AA is still much better known than we are; we must improve.
- We have an Information Committee at the national level and a P.I. representative in each Intergroup. Some members attend AA's P.I. meetings. We visit schools, industries and so on, but it is difficult to get on TV. We are also confused about the difference between promotion and attraction.
- Attraction is identifying who we are and what we do; promotion is making promises.
- Al-Anon is only ten years old in my country. We have had some exposure on TV under AA's initiative. Our new P.I. Committee will begin work in a few weeks time. P.I. work at the District level is easier because one can make contact with private broadcasters. We also struggle with the questions of promotion vs. attraction.
- We need some guidance on the question of participation in various health fairs and other events that may appear to suggest affiliation.
- Affiliation and promotion are both really philosophical questions. When we participate in an outside event, are we promoting the program? We do not endorse anything, we make ourselves available, providing information to the public about our program keeps us within the Traditions. If an organization wants to put our name on its program, we can ask that they list Al-Anon as a cooperating agency. It is Al-Anon's responsibility not to put an outside organization's name on our material. This breaks our Traditions. We do want our presence felt; we want to be there for people in need.



# ROLE OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

*Alice C., Delegate  
from Argentina*

In April 1973, Al-Anon in Argentina was incorporated as a non-profit organization. The By-Laws based on another non-profit association were drawn up without any mention of a Board of Trustees and stated that the organization was to be administered by a "Comision Directiva"—a governing Board or Executive Committee comprising of seven members. The Committee was to be elected at an Annual General Meeting attended by members who pay monthly dues. By law, we had to have at least 12 members who paid dues, so we decided it would be best not to restrict the number to 12, but to accept all who wished to become a paying member. Money was needed to print literature. Since there were few groups, it seemed a good way to be self-supporting. Thus, in the eyes of the law, our association is headed by our Comision Directiva and the 175 current paying members legally have a right to decide matters affecting our GSO as a whole. This may seem to be in conflict with Al-Anon's worldwide policy of not accepting dues for membership, but remember that we are speaking of the GSO and not the fellowship.

In 1978, after sending an observer to the World Service Conference and two WSO members visited our GSO, a group of oldtimers on the Comision Directiva decided to start the Board of Trustees. Both meetings were held monthly on the same day, the first half devoted to one committee, the second to the other. A definite break was later made.

The fellowship kept growing. We had our Comision Directiva with our By-Laws, which includes a deep respect for our Traditions—as a Board for affairs outside Al-Anon; inside the fellowship we had our Board of Trustees with the Traditions and Concepts. Both Boards worked toward the same end.

We knew that at the WSO things were

different and most of us became fully aware of the difference when the Board of Trustees met last year, prior to our first Conference, to review our brand new National Service Handbook for necessary changes. We realized our Comision Directiva had to form part of the Conference as well as the Board of Trustees; it was a must, as the former carried legal weight.

Our first Conference (trial) took place last October and the slate of nine members composing the Board—many dating back to 1978—was approved unanimously. The Board had kept to itself until then and had been nicknamed "the untouchables." This shows that although most within the fellowship knew the Board of Trustees existed and worked in service, they did not know the people who formed part of it. Our first Conference did much to unite us all in the fellowship.

A Committee was soon made up to study the way the Board of Trustees could be included in our By-Laws and thus make the Comision Directiva and the Board one and the same. For this, the WSO was consulted for assistance and work is underway. No problems have so far arisen despite different legal and traditional structures, but we feel a By-Law change would help avoid any future misunderstandings. If the idea is accepted and we get a quorum to change the By-Laws, there will be no more members paying dues and the needs of the fellowship will be truly decided both legally and traditionally at the Conference.

Our Board of Trustees relates to the fellowship through the Policy Committee, the Conference, our General Secretary and Volunteer Committees. In each outgoing report the Board's word, opinion or participation is invariably known. We are also studying the possibility of incorporating Regional Trustees, which would address the needs of the different provinces.

The Board discovers the needs of the fellowship through questionnaires, reports, visiting districts, the Volunteer Committees, the General Secretary and the Conference.

Board members are found by studying members who chair different committee



meetings or others who carry out service work. In 1978, a Nominating Committee was formed to look for suitable members for the Board and Comision Directiva, but it was not successful and the Board as a whole has since taken on that responsibility.

Since the beginning, the role of the Board of Trustees has been to safeguard our Twelve Traditions, working closely together in service to strengthen the unity of purpose which links Argentina and the rest of the world. The Board's role is also administrative and could easily become cold and unfeeling if Al-Anon's primary purpose were forgotten. This will not happen if the Board, guided by a power greater than itself, lives up to the trust and authority conveyed to it and carries out its work with warmth and sensitivity, thus striking a balance.

## **ROLE OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

***Bob D., Delegate  
from U. S. & Canada***

Having been Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the WSO for only four months, I cannot bring you a wealth of experience from that position, but the description of those first four months may be educational.

I was nominated for this office at the January 1986 Board meeting and started preparing for my first duty as chairman, presenting a list of the new committee chairman appointments for Board approval at their May meeting. This is one of the most important functions the Board Chairman performs and I spent many weeks reviewing each committee and the list of available qualified people.

There are 18 committees for which a chairman must be named. Many are chaired by competent incumbents who have been chairman for less than the three

years maximum. Those who are ineligible to serve on a particular committee can chair another. One of the Board Chairman's duties is to recruit new people who will enhance the operation of the WSO; people who can lead, have initiative and the ability to get things done without losing sight of our principles. These people are also considered in terms of future Trustees.

I discussed these concerns with the past Chairman of the Board, the General Secretary, various Staff Secretaries and potential chairpersons. When I thought I had nearly everything in place, one of the Trustees resigned due to ill health and another potential chairman changed her mind during the WSC. Finally, the night before the May meeting, I had my list complete and was satisfied. At the meeting I was elected, the Board approved my appointments and all systems were go. I breathed a sigh of relief and took a vacation.

When I came back, I found the Conference Secretary retired due to her health; then things started to unravel. The newly appointed Conference Chairman—also an At-Large member of the Executive Committee—was hired for the Conference Secretary position. This left two vacancies to be filled. This meant more moving around of people.

At this point, I wondered if I had the authority to make these appointments. Though I also knew that leaving the positions open until the next regular Board meeting would seriously impair the operation of the Conference and Executive Committees. Convening a special Board meeting would be unwise, given our present financial condition. So I re-read the Concepts, the By-Laws and the Trustee Guidelines and held long discussions with the last two Chairmen and the General Secretary. I concluded that I could appoint the new committee chairmen even if Board approval were delayed until July, but the issue of the Executive Committee would best be resolved by a phone poll of Board members. All were agreeable to the changes.

That was two months ago and things have been relatively quiet since. We are in



our second year of a three year trial period of having the Board Chairman also chair the Executive Committee. Since the Board Chairman attends all Executive Committee meetings and needs to be advised of all actions, there seems to be no added burden on the Board Chairman. It has the further advantage of removing the double-headed management relationship with respect to the General Secretary.

## COMMENTS

*Q. Who are Trustees? How are they chosen? Does the Conference elect or approve a selection?*

A. The Board nominates At-Large Trustees in January, who are usually long-time members familiar with at least one aspect of service. Each nominee fills out a profile sheet which gives the Board an idea of the scope of their service. The nomination process for Regional Trustees begins in the appropriate Area. Each Area selects a nominee which is then brought to the Conference. There is a regional election at Conference which nominates Regional Trustees. The name of the nominee goes to the Board which ultimately elects the nominee.

At the WSO, the Nominating Committee became a regular operating committee a few years ago; subsequently, a Conference Committee on Trustees, comprising Delegate members, was formed to provide more Delegate input into the nominating process.

*Q. Should Trustees serve as Committee Chairmen?*

A. It would be difficult for a Trustee to know the nuts and bolts of service if his/her involvement were limited to the four quarterly Board meetings. The added exposure provided by a chairmanship helps enhance their understanding and also keeps the ratio of WSO to Delegates' votes at the World Service Conference in proportion. As the fellowship in the U.S. & Canada grew and the need for more committees reflected this growth, the number of WSO members at the Conference began to get unwieldy. The WSC then voted that WSO representation could not exceed  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the total number

of voting members.

*Q. In order for our GSO to maintain not-for-profit status, we must indicate where our funds would go if we dissolved as an organization. How do we answer?*

A. Most GSO By-Laws stipulate that in the event of dissolution, the funds would go to another non-profit organization. The U.K. & Eire's GSO has articles of association and the WSO has articles of incorporation which clearly state how funds would be redistributed.

## DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, SIMILAR PROBLEMS

*Suzanne V., Delegate  
from French-Belgium*

Although Al-Anon has a firm foundation in Belgium, we are still experiencing many of the troubles that plagued us from the beginning.

The people in Al-Anon may be from different backgrounds and religions (sometimes incompatible), but they all have similar symptoms; they are disturbed people with emotional problems who come seeking a quick yet long-lasting solution to a difficult problem. Often their first Al-Anon meeting shatters their hopes of an easy fix and they never come back. Those who stay and reap benefits from our meetings, revitalizing themselves in the process, are eventually asked to repay their debt and serve. However, the recovering Al-Anon member may prefer to use spare time for his or her own pleasure, rather than become involved in service. Thus, finding members to serve can be a difficult task.

The problem experienced by relatives of alcoholics does not always seem credible to many people. In Belgium, a number of social organizations do not even consider Al-Anon a viable approach. They look for results, statistics, and proof. This, of course, is not how our program works.

Our Traditions were established to avoid the problems experienced by AA groups, but are often practically unknown to our



members. Ironically, it is our Tradition of liberty which creates a lack of participation by the membership. Our flexible Traditions allow for different interpretations. These differences may cause disagreements within the fellowship, but with the passage of time, Al-Anon pulls through and is enriched.

Twenty-six years ago, Al-Anon was born in Belgium thanks to the efforts of one doctor. At the beginning, we were short of everything—groups and literature. It was 1972 before the first provincial Intergroup around Brussels was formed. Other Intergroups followed and in 1974 the first General Assembly took place in French-speaking Belgium to satisfy a need to know each other and to meet on a national level.

The National Service Office was opened the following year and in 1979 our journal, *Serenity*, appeared. The General Assembly became an annual event and we decided to translate, in collaboration with members in France, *THE DILEMMA OF THE ALCOHOLIC MARRIAGE*. Later it was printed in Belgium and distributed simultaneously in the two countries. This was the first of many fruitful experiences with our neighbors.

From 1978 onward we became even more independent, notably vis-a-vis AA. In 1980, a decision was made to create an ASBL (a non-profit organization with special fiscal and legal status), helping to improve our status. From this a Business Board developed along with a need for establishing committees to operate between the Board and ordinary members (i.e., committees for Information, Production and Literature, as well as an Executive Committee). Later, the Budget Committee was formed along with the Alateen Committee.

Some of our members feel we are too structured and compare us to a skeleton without flesh. Obviously our structure can seem formidable in relation to the small number of our members. Sometimes our message is so subtle that it doesn't reach the ears of those who need to hear the good news.

Today we find ourselves facing a paradox of having a solid structure created out of

the needs of members who know little or nothing about the Concepts of Service.

It is also worth noting that a large part of our difficulties arise from using voluntary staff. Our office is open eight hours per week (two afternoons). We dream of having a paid full-time employee to look after our needs. We have tried to open a service two hours for two evenings per week, but had to stop after two years due to lack of volunteers. In any case, there were few phone calls or visitors, due always to the same problems of lack of general knowledge of Al-Anon's existence.

Another goal of ours is the creation of a European headquarters—New York is far away. We had encouraging cooperation with France, but this has since withered away. Still we have some good contacts based mainly on the goodwill of individuals rather than on an official basis. Contacts with French-speaking Swiss are zero; they never replied to our overtures.

I conclude with a question mark regarding our evolution. Our wish is to survive and develop; that the message of Al-Anon will be just as well known in Belgium as the Red Cross. We have many difficult steps to cover and good intentions are not enough in themselves. Let us hope.

## DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, SIMILAR PROBLEMS

*Siri R., Delegate  
from Norway*

Al-Anon groups have been in Norway since 1960, but our structure did not begin until 1980.

Norway is a small country with only about four million people. Our mountains and fjords make travel difficult and the Norwegian people are not inclined to talk to people we do not know, especially if we have problems. These factors have much to do with the fact that after all these years we have only 23 Al-Anon groups, but we are growing—five of the groups began last year.



Although our Service Office began in the country town of Farsund, there were simply not enough people to staff and the work seemed to end up on one person. The office eventually moved to Bergen after thorough discussion with all the groups.

We are three people working at the office, one of whom is an accountant. It is vital that this job be done by a professional; when it comes to money, people can become suspicious quite easily. Knowing our finances are well taken care of is very comforting.

There is also a General Secretary we call a "Daily Leader." The three of us work full-time jobs during the day, so the work at the Service Office is done in the evenings.

All our literature has to be translated into Norwegian. Today we have some 20 pamphlets and the ONE DAY AT A TIME IN AL-ANON, which is now in its second edition. Our Literature Committee is constantly at work on translations, but it still seems we cannot get enough translated quickly enough. It is not possible to have everything done at once. We have to accept the level that we are at today. We do grow, but we have to take the time needed at the Service Office, as well as in the groups.

This year we have been working on our Service Handbook for Norway (trial) to be approved at our Service Meeting in October. If everyone has and uses a handbook, it will make so many things clearer. Getting service workers is easier when they are more familiar with how things work.

Some solutions we have used for getting service workers interested is to tell them about things again and again. Let them start out by doing fairly simple tasks and soon they will want to progress onto more challenging work.

The production of our monthly magazine, *STEP BY STEP*, also moved to Bergen. It began with three people working on it, but soon there was only one person left. This was too much for one person and she had to ask someone else to take over. No one else would assist, but some Bergen Al-Anon members agreed and now there are six people working on it. They are getting sharings from all over the country, although it

was not easy at first. It is always easier to have somebody else do it, but after groups from outside of Bergen were repeatedly challenged to contribute, we no longer had to rely on reprinted material from *The FORUM*. Members are more interested in reading stories they can easily identify with, particularly when a name or situation is recognizable.

The Service Office has its special pages in the magazine, "News From The Office," to provide members with information about what is going on every month. Although we do not have news to share each month, there is always something to write about and it is a good way to remind the fellowship that the Service Office reflects the groups and we all depend on one another.

One thing we have learned is not to put too much responsibility on a single individual. Al-Anon is not a "one-man show." We try to make sure that at least two people are involved whenever possible. It is much easier to like something when you can share the work with somebody else.

Our P.I. Committee is in Oslo, the capital, and our Literature Committee is in the city of Stavenger; this arrangement seems to be working well. To get a variety of people interested in service work, we have found that it is important to have committees that are spread around the country.

Although Al-Anon in Norway is not all that big, we are growing and somehow I am glad we are not growing too quickly. I think this is why we have had so few problems.

## COMMENTS

- Service is difficult; we must not make it harder for those who come after us.
- Volunteers should be told what the job entails.
- Those in service must find others in the groups.
- Keep encouraging members to share their written stories.
- It is important in some structures to have the National Committee setup in different cities than at the GSO. This gives a



variety of members the opportunity to serve on the national level.

## COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STRUCTURES

**Ruth P.,**  
***Delegate from the U. K. & Eire***

Just as Al-Anon members need practice during the week between regular meetings, so communication between countries needs to go on throughout the years between the meetings.

We know all General Service Meeting Delegates speak English and that we can write to each other in that language and exchange information.

Continued communication will come about through a common language. It is by finding members in other countries who speak our own language that the exchange of knowledge about our service work will come. The historical ties of culture and trade will naturally draw us together and that is where efforts at sponsoring another country can begin.

In the U. K. & Eire, we try to seize every opportunity to share the details of our structure with overseas visitors. Members who visit our GSO are given a warm welcome and are shown our leaflets, posters and our Handbook. If the visitor is an editor of a newsletter, we tell them how our magazine is prepared, printed and dispatched. If they are interested in our literature stocks, they can see the systems we use and how we control them.

We are fortunate in having a staff member who represented us at the World Service Conference and International Al-Anon General Services Meeting. She has a wide view of Al-Anon and is able to reply to the considerable amount of overseas mail requesting information or literature—the latter is mainly from British members living abroad, all of whom are encouraged to register with the WSO.

Every year we invite other structures to attend our Service Conference. They come

as observers with no voice and no vote, and at their own expense. It enables them to see our Conference in action and may stimulate them in their own service work. Visits from the WSO staff have been very helpful to us and many difficult questions have been answered by them at both our Conference and Board Meetings.

Another opportunity arose many years ago when Al-Anon in the U.K. & Eire was very young. A member's daughter was working near New York and on visits to her she also visited the WSO. The help and suggestions she received there and the many letters exchanged afterward, led directly to the formation of our Districts and the holding of our First Service Conference.

At our last IAGSM, I sat next to Gudrun from Germany on the bus to Stepping Stones. She asked me to speak at their Convention in Germany. In the wave of enthusiasm generated by our meeting, I said yes. Some months later I found myself at the Cologne Airport, not speaking a word of German, on my way to speak at their convention.

I had been asked to share how our Service Conference began, the importance of it in our structure and how it is the group conscience of the U.K. & Eire. Gudrun tells me it helped Germany take one more step toward forming the First German Conference.

Since then, letters have flown to and fro. We sent copies of the standard letters that our Conference Secretary sends to all Delegates before the Conference. We sent them a copy of the brochure which Delegates receive. We told them how we cost it all and who undertakes the work. In other words, how we organize our Conference.

Then the German GSO sent their Conference Chairman and another member of the Committee who translated for her to our Service Conference last year. They found great encouragement and lots of ideas. We felt enriched by their presence and it helped the representatives in the U.K. & Eire to be aware that Al-Anon is a worldwide fellowship.

I have accepted their kind invitation to attend their First Conference which is to be



held in November this year. All this from a conversation on the bus to Stepping Stones.

Our own structure has grown and developed through sound communication with our WSO over many years. They have the longest experience and the greatest number of members and therefore the largest group conscience. The World Service Conference is the expression of that conscience and for some years the U. K. & Eire sent a representative, though not since the founding of the IAGSM. We could never have grown as we have without the support and strength so generously given by the American and Canadian members.

In the same way that in our personal recovery we share only our experience and do not give advice, so it is in our communication with other structures. There may be dangers in a Delegate working in isolation, giving his or her personal views. In the U.K. & Eire the two Delegates work as a team, answering letters together and sending a copy to our General Secretary. The work is not left to one person and can more truly represent the current thinking in our structure.

We are also trying to use the experience of past Delegates on a continuing basis by involving them in the preparation work and giving them information because they represent another part of our structure.

I think we have to reach out for information, to be willing to exchange our magazine, Handbooks and Conference Summaries. As International Delegates, we are the channels through which information can flow, both to our own and other structures throughout the world.

This communicating between structures that we try to do is not new. It is following in a tradition begun by Lois, our co-founder, many years ago when she carried the message on her trips abroad.

## COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STRUCTURES

*Ingolfur K.,  
Delegate from Iceland*

When I was here in 1984 I hardly knew what the word "structure" meant. I felt rather inferior to hear about the complicated structures in other countries, our structure in Iceland was so simple. I discovered many new things and I was determined that Iceland would now take a leap forward, the structure refreshed and everything put in order. Helga, the other Delegate in 1984, and I attended many meetings and explained to our members what we had seen and heard. We made some mistakes which we had the courage to admit, the serenity to tolerate and learn from. Changes were slow to appear and one of our mistakes was to expect them too quickly.

The first important effect of the 1984 IAGSM was when we held an Icelandic Service Meeting in March 1986 with 45 representatives. We discussed the Twelve Steps and Traditions, group structure, meeting ideas, finance, CAL, guidelines and the Twelve Concepts of Service.

In order for a group to work and activity to grow, a structure is formed, facilitating communication between groups and providing literature. I was first an inactive participant who thought that literature fell from the clouds, free of charge.

Some in Iceland doubted the value of establishing an office. They now consider it an important center for our work. The relations within our structure, however, might be better. Members are not well informed enough about the work outside the group. The GRs may not always pass on sufficiently well what goes on at the District Meetings, for example, and there is a certain lack of interest concerning what goes on outside the group. This of course is a result of lack of information; members must be given clear information as to what is happening.

Iceland's communication on an interna-



tional basis did not begin until the 1984 IAGSM. The General Service Office was not opened until November 1983. Since 1984, there has been some communication with Norway and we have bought literature from them. Recently, we obtained a few copies of everything they have published, including the summary from the 1984 IAGSM. It is not surprising that contact with Norway has been the greatest as our languages are similar and most Icelanders can read Norwegian. Communication with England has been less, although I visited the GSO in London and we have literature from their office. Australia has been sending AUSTRA-LINK since 1984 and Icelandic Al-Anon members in Australia have been receiving literature from our GSO. The same applies to Icelanders in Luxembourg who have an Icelandic group. Thus we can say that the Icelandic GSO has had influence on the work in various countries.

As for publishing material, there are many traps to fall into and I think we in Iceland have fallen into them all. When the ODAT was translated, it seemed a good opportunity to publish it in Icelandic. At a Publishing Committee meeting it was agreed to buy the manuscript from a translator after the committee had read a portion of it. The translator offered to sell the translation at a 25% discount of the prevailing rate. The manuscript went to the printers who never actually produced anything. A year passed and the translator was becoming impatient for payment, only part of which he had received on delivering the manuscript. When the translator finally submitted his bill to the GSO, it turned out to be higher than expected. We could not pay this amount and I was soon summoned to appear before the Municipal Court on behalf of Al-Anon for non-payment of the translator's bill. Fortunately, one of our members is a lawyer and is now trying to come to an agreement with the translator for more reasonable payment. We have learned much from our mistakes.

It can be seen that plenty is happening at the GSO in Iceland and in spite of all the mistakes, we are growing. We are a young organization and are battling with teething

troubles, which many other countries have already overcome. We are, therefore, interested to know what their experiences have been.

## **DISCUSSION**

- Regarding problems with professional translators, our structure uses only Al-Anon members. We think members can better capture the philosophy of the program.
- Our office pays for staff members to attend English classes.
- Problems with printers not living up to their commitments can be addressed by getting bids from several different printers in advance, choosing the one with the best offer and getting the contract in writing.
- The Scandinavian structures held an informal meeting this week and discovered how much we have in common. We want to pursue this kind of dialogue with the goal of someday holding a common meeting in our countries.

## **BID FOR THE 1988 IAGSM**

**Myrna H., WSO  
General Secretary**

The WSO's General Secretary, Myrna H., reviewed those motions of the 1984 IAGSM dealing with future meetings:

- That consideration be given to holding the 1988 IAGSM outside the United States.
- That Delegates from structures interested in hosting the IAGSM come prepared with a bid for presentation.

"The WSO," she said, "had assumed that in keeping with AA's scheduling, IAGSMs would be held every four years outside the U.S. and every four years inside the U.S. If that were not the wishes of the Delegates,



however, other scheduling arrangements would be discussed."

The first order of business was to entertain bids from Norway, Switzerland and the U.K. & Eire, including slide presentations with questions and answers. Following a lively discussion, a motion was approved that the 1988 IAGSM be held in the U.K. & Eire and that in the event of an emergency, it be held in Switzerland (34 in favor, 1 against). The Delegates unanimously voted that the 1990 IAGSM be held in the United States.

## DISCUSSION

- The WSO Board voted at its last meeting to maintain the equalized expense ratio: 75% WSO, 25% General Service Office for the 1988 meeting. Based on the U.K. & Eire's bid (which would be roughly the same for any European country), the Board calculated that given the equalized expense, an overseas IAGSM would cost participants \$100 more than if it were held in the U.S. The bulk of the cost difference was attributed to airfare.
- It is important to get fresh views from outside the U.S., but it is equally important to return here—to the original source. Meeting with the WSO staff and touching base is vital for many countries with younger growing structures.

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A question was raised regarding criteria for serving as IAGSM Delegate, particularly in terms of participation at Board of Trustees meetings. The session that followed elicited several motions and much discussion:

- In my country, Delegates are not encouraged to attend Board meetings. I wonder if that impedes our ability to effectively serve the structure at the international level.
- Since I am the Delegate, I continue to attend Board meetings, although my term as a Board member has ended.

- If you are representing your structure at this international meeting, you must be informed; otherwise you come here and you simply sit. It is vital to be involved with the Board, although it is not necessary that the Delegate vote on Board matters.

The following motion was approved by the IAGSM (with one abstention): *That as it is essential that IAGSM Delegates be fully informed on all activities of General Service Office in their country. It is suggested that they be invited to attend Board and/or other appropriate meetings during their term in office in order to reflect their structure's current thinking and service needs.*

- Perhaps we should formulate some kind of guidelines about criteria for serving as a Delegate. Thus far, we have stated that speaking English and being knowledgeable about the national structure is all that is required.
- I am afraid that if we establish an Admissions Committee, or something like one, we may tend to be exclusionary.
- The Admissions Committee to the WSC deals mainly with the unusual rather than the usual. With respect to the IAGSM, establishing a specific Admissions Committee would add to this body's independence, making the decisions more an international group conscience rather than WSO's.

A motion stating that an Admissions Committee be formed on a trial basis for the IAGSM. Its members consist of Delegates and members of the International Coordination Committee. In an effort to get this committee off the ground and to avoid being too premature in establishing its parameters—another motion was passed, calling for *that an ad hoc committee be appointed by the IAGSM Chairman to develop guidelines and procedures for the Admissions Committee (trial). The results will be reported at the 1988 IAGSM.* (33-0-2)

- We should begin to take responsibility for our own meeting, our own Delegates.
- Will setting up an ad hoc committee be another obstacle? Are we “committee-ing” ourselves to death? It strikes me somewhat silly, setting up a committee to look into setting up a committee.
- Yes, it may seem so, but in fact it is a necessary safeguard. First, we do not have enough time to determine how the Admissions Committee will ultimately function. We haven’t spent enough time looking into who should sit on it, what kind of results we expect, timetables, etc. The idea of an ad hoc committee is a good one. This committee will try to accomplish a specific goal and then gracefully disband once that goal has been achieved.

## 1990 INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

Delegates were asked to inform their membership about the 1990 International Convention which will be held in Seattle, Washington, the weekend following the 4th of July. The WSO was especially eager (as in 1985) for English-speaking Al-Anon members from all over the world to speak on topics of their choice. The coordination of workshops by other countries would be arranged through the GSOs. When interest is expressed, the WSO will give the GSO the time and room assignment. The GSO will provide the speakers, title of workshops and correspond with speakers or delegate a responsible member who plans to attend the Convention to do this. Communication on this matter would follow.



# WORKSHOPS/ REPORTBACK



## CONCEPTS

**Mary R., Reporter,  
Delegate from Australia**

*What is the purpose of the Concepts?*

The Steps are a small circle, the Traditions a larger circle and the Concepts an even larger circle. The Steps are used for personal recovery, the Traditions for group unity and the Concepts for worldwide unity. Use of the Concepts ensures the security of our program, safeguarding its survival. Application of the Concepts can help us avoid unnecessary mistakes and protects us as individuals, as groups and as a worldwide organization.

Concepts provide guidelines and serve as goals. In order to better understand their applicability to different situations, they must be read and re-read. Discussion of the Concepts helps us interpret their meaning and to enhance our understanding of them. They guarantee the equality of all members' voices and the sharing of opinions rather than the dominance of a single authority.

Concepts give balance; some members may feel that GSOs are too powerful—the Concepts enable us to explain the GSO's function and help members appreciate its usefulness. Concepts help us live together in service, to understand service needs, to strive for leadership qualities and to protect minority opinions.

*How can service members come to a better understanding of the Concepts?*

It is useless to try to "tell" members about the Concepts if there is no interest. One country reported some success at a Regional Service Seminar in securing a captive audience for a discussion on Concepts.

Some concern was expressed regarding

members using Concepts out of context to prove various points. Also mentioned, was having to use the Concepts to correct inadequate performance by a service member. It was suggested that this be done gently, with the spirit of Al-Anon caring. It was felt that service sponsorship could generate interest and that study of the Concepts might be included as a vital part of service knowledge, right from the beginning. A short easy-to-read pamphlet describing the Concepts was also recommended as a way to enhance members' understanding and interest; such a pamphlet is currently being prepared by the WSO.

*What is meant by substantial unanimity?*

It was agreed that substantial unanimity could not be established as a permanent or absolute figure, but rather on a case-by-case basis. Each General Service Meeting may need to decide for itself, depending on the issues under discussion. If there is any doubt whether substantial unanimity has been achieved, it would be better to refer the issue in question to a later date after careful study of the Concepts. The issue may then be resolved with unanimity. It is important in such cases that members feel their voices are being heard and that their opinions are being respected. We are less likely to accept group conscience if we feel we have not been given an opportunity to be heard.

It was also noted that obtaining substantial unanimity may occasionally be as important as the actual issue in question.

*The descriptive text of the Concepts relates to the WSO. How does your structure handle this?*

Much of the discussion centered on the different GSOs' special national service needs in contrast to the Concept text, particularly in terms of legal requirements and translation concerns. Time was spent for-



mulating a recommendation, later brought before the full IAGSM and unanimously approved, stating that the wording of the Twelve Concepts of Service as written on the contents page (p. 3) of the Al-Anon Twelve Concepts of Service Manual remain as in original form and not be changed for reasons of national structure.

## **ALATEEN**

**Jessie G., Reporter,  
Delegate from New Zealand**

### **Alateen group membership**

Workshop participants agreed that Alateen growth was slow, but fairly steady with the average age hovering somewhere between 10 and 14 years of age; ages 14 - 20 seemed a more difficult group to hold on to. A flourishing, healthy group can often be the result of a good chairman. It was also noted, there currently appears to be less denial on the part of parents and they are more amenable to encouraging their children to seek help.

### **Alateen sponsorship**

There is still a problem in finding Al-Anon sponsors for Alateen groups. AA members are more likely to be available (as well as OAs, NAs and Emotions Anonymous members). Another issue discussed was the legal responsibility in some countries that the sponsor has regarding the need to report incidents of abuse or incest as shared at a meeting. This can present a difficult conflict between abiding by the law and maintaining credibility within the group.

As for gays and agnostics/atheists qualifying as sponsors, it was agreed that Al-Anon does not discriminate against anyone and if the sponsor is able to separate sponsorship from his/her lifestyle, there should not be a problem. The Al-Anon membership, as a whole, should be educated slowly and comprehensively about the need for and importance of Alateen sponsors. The three "Cs" were mentioned as an appropriate slogan to bear in mind; comfort, courage and commitment.

## **ORGANIZING A GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE**

**Pat S., Reporter,  
Delegate from France**

The major criterion for organizing a General Service Conference (not to be confused with the IAGSM itself) at the national level is for the service structure to get input from the groups, who may not always see the need. Depending on the resources available to each service structure, the meeting may be organized by a committee (which may do nothing else but prepare for each year's GSM) or even by a single individual with a telephone.

Conference Chairmen may be elected or appointed and the theme may be chosen by the previous General Service Conference. All workshop participants reported that their General Service Conferences were held annually.

The question of group conscience was also discussed. Substantial unanimity was defined in terms of specific needs of the moment, and not as something to be arranged for in advance. Alateen was generally represented at the General Service Conference through a Standing Alateen Committee, although one country reported having a much more independent Alateen structure that sends its own Delegates to the GSC.

## **ARCHIVES/ LONG-RANGE PLANNING WORKSHOP**

**Rocio H., Reporter,  
Delegate from Mexico**

*What is the purpose of establishing an Area Archives?*

The purpose of an Area Archives is to preserve the experience, history and memorabilia of the Al-Anon fellowship in that locale, having it available to the mem-



bership and the serious researcher, within the framework of the Traditions. Area Archives are needed because the WSO does not have the capacity to hold all important data from all over the world.

*How can a structure begin to develop an Archives?*

Guidelines for Area Archives are available from the WSO. Finding someone to act as Archivist is a beginning. Suitable storage space must also be found.

*How would a structure maintain confidentiality while cooperating with researchers?*

Have knowledge of copyright laws of the land. Secure permission in writing from members for their sharings to be turned over to Archives. (A copy of the WSO questionnaire for group and individual history as well as formal releases are available on request.)

*Why is it important to plan ahead?*

It is important for structures to have a long-range goal to anticipate any major changes (social, economical, etc.) that would affect the fellowship within a country or major interruptions in the day-to-day activities of the office (i.e., damage due to earthquakes or floods, having records wiped out, etc.)

*How can a structure develop a long-range plan?*

Through a Committee (subcommittee of the Board) to brainstorm ideas and develop alternatives for any situation that could cause disruption of service or to find ways to enhance future services.

## **TRADITIONS**

***Herminia F., Reporter,  
Delegate from Costa Rica***

*How can unity be re-established once it has been broken?*

Group unity can be broken by trying to always imitate AA, by violating anonymity, by gossiping, or by bringing non-Al-Anon issues into our groups.

Unity can be re-established by going

back to the Traditions which may be used as a meeting topic or by taking a group inventory. Programming meetings on our literature or on specific topics dealing with the problem can also help restore unity. The tools of the program enable us to heal ourselves. Al-Anon helps us let go if we are enabling, even within our own group. Knowledge of the Traditions is the responsibility of the entire group not just one person. Sometimes egos can get in the way. Focusing meetings on Al-Anon rather than AA can bring unity to the group. Meetings on the meaning of anonymity gives information to members.

At the WSC, an open sharing session is held at the beginning and the end of the Conference. Delegates are encouraged to clear the air by giving voice to whatever questions or concerns may be on their mind. This helps maintain group unity.

*How does group conscience relate to autonomy, service and the Traditions?*

While group autonomy is considered by some to be above the Traditions, the group will ultimately wither and die if the Traditions are being violated. In Al-Anon even adherence to the Traditions is unenforceable. No one in Al-Anon can be more than a "trusted servant." All who are in service should take care to avoid becoming a Mr. or Mrs. Al-Anon.

*How can we maintain service while abiding by the Traditions of self-support?*

Fundraising from outside the fellowship breaks Traditions as does accepting rent-free quarters for meetings. We should always pay in some way (i.e., exchanging literature with those organizations that do not accept rent). Accepting furniture and reduced rent is within Traditions, however; and money may be raised from within the fellowship (via raffles or conventions or simple pleading and appeals). Where Al-Anon was just beginning, members prepaid for books in order to pay the printers. Convention planners often send donations to national offices.

*How can members be attracted without promotion?*

We attract members to Al-Anon by identifying who we are and what we do. This can be conveyed via posters in public transportation areas, newspaper announcements, TV appearance (using back-lighting and no last names), and other types of P.I. work. It was noted that sometimes we are a little too anonymous. We can also carry the message on a one-to-one basis without breaking our own anonymity if we do not choose to do so.

*How do we handle a District and Information Center that print their own literature?*

Once members become aware that the literature being sold is not Conference-Approved, they generally stop purchasing it. Our own literature, of course, must be good enough to ensure that it is appealing to the membership.

## **STRUCTURE**

***Marina H., Reporter,  
Delegate from Brazil***

*What suggestions can you offer a national structure beginning to develop?*

It was suggested that new structures introduce the WSO terms rather than invent their own vocabulary. The WSO Guidelines

should be used and kept in their original form. One structure shared that at first revising the WSO Guidelines and service manuals seemed more convenient and efficient, but later, when it was apparent that the original form was more appropriate, it became very difficult to change old habits. It was recommended that new structures look ahead and leave plenty of room for growth. Stress having proportionate representation at national conferences and avoid getting stuck in narrow thinking which is shortsighted and counter productive.

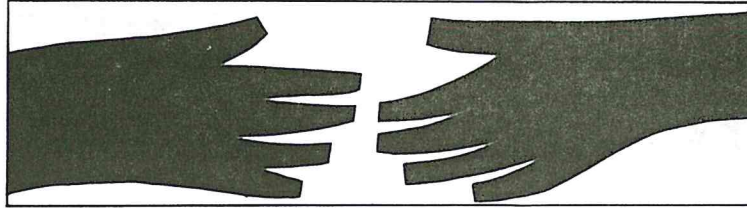
*What is an Area World Service Committee and how does it function?*

An Area Committee is a steering committee, not a governing committee. It offers suggestions to the Assembly, but makes no decisions itself. It comprises Delegates, a Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary, Coordinator, DRs and Area Information Service Representative. Assuming an Area can make structural improvements usually leads them to confusion and a return to the Handbook.

***"Pain is the cornerstone of growth."***  
*(Rose M., International Coordination Committee Chairman)*



# SPIRITUAL SHARING

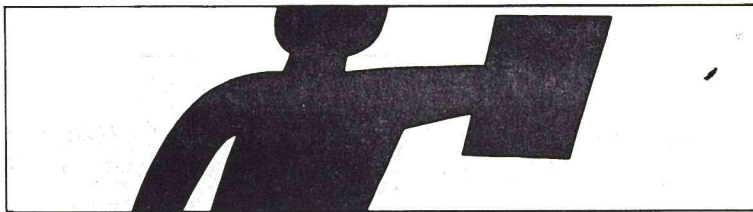


## **Margaret O'B., WSO Archivist Lead the Discussion**

- Despite our differences of sex, age and accent, we share the same pain, happiness, and spiritual awakenings.
- Al-Anon restored and enriched my spiritual life. The Higher Power reminds me that I am not perfect, I am human. Sometimes he reminds me quite bluntly. To be all that my Higher Power knows I can be (if I cooperate with His will) is a great comfort and a great challenge.
- My relationship with my Higher Power is a very intimate one. It is a blink away, a heartbeat away, a breath in and a breath out.
- Accepting my own imperfections has helped me to accept others with all their imperfections.
- At one point in my life (after Al-Anon for me and AA for my husband), I felt that my problems had defeated me. I got down on my knees and said, "I believe a Power greater than myself will restore me to sanity and I will turn my life over to God's care." Nothing dramatic happened, but I felt a real release. I knew I was not alone. I realized there are no real stumbling blocks, just opportunities for us to take another direction.
- I come from a very anti-religious family. I am learning to let go, but letting God is much more difficult for me.
- Before I came into Al-Anon, I was a militant atheist. I had nothing but contempt for believers; I felt they were weaklings. And as a scientist, my training tended to confirm my position. In Al-Anon I was told, "If you do not believe, make believe," which I thought was stupid. But I discovered that it came in handy (and I did not have to tell anyone). I tried it and found I did believe in something—something more than just the power of the group; also, that there really is a Power greater than myself.
- Discovering through Al-Anon that his alcoholism was not my fault led to a release and a revelation; it marked the beginning of my spiritual awareness.
- With the help of my Higher Power, I know there are no problems I cannot resolve. I may not know how I will resolve them, but I know they will be resolved.

# MOTIONS

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The following motions were brought before the Delegates:

- That the number of voting Planning Committee members at the IAGSM never exceed  $\frac{1}{3}$  the number of Delegates.
- That it is essential the IAGSM Delegates be fully informed on all activities of the General Service Office in their country. It is suggested they be invited to attend Board and/or other appropriate meetings during their term of office in order to reflect their structure's current thinking and service needs.
- That an Admissions Committee be formed on a trial basis for the IAGSM. Its members to consist of Delegates and members of the International Coordination Committee.
- That an ad hoc committee be appointed by the IAGSM Chairman to develop guidelines and procedures for the Admissions Committee (trial). The results will be reported at the 1988 IAGSM.
- That the wording of the Twelve Concepts of Service Manual\* remain as in the original form and not be changed for reason of national structure.
- That the 1988 IAGSM be held in the U.K. & Eire. In the event of an emergency, that it be held in Switzerland.
- That the 1990 IAGSM be held in the United States.

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\*As written on the contents page (p. 3) of the Al-Anon Twelve Concepts of Service Manual.



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