

**Feb. 28, 2010**

Vada learned last night that the Grapevine is in serious trouble. John K., Northeast Regional Trustee, informed the Delegates present at this year's NERAASA that the magazine, as of December 21<sup>st</sup> 2008, already owed the General Service Board \$375,000. They have since borrowed another \$50,000, and are requesting another \$138,000 to see them through '09. Plus another \$246,000 to continue through 2010. I just happened to have the Final Report of the twenty sixth General Service Conference. From the 1976 Conference report it was reported; \**"Income increased last year, so directors voted a contribution of \$25,000. to the General Service Board."*

\**"The stock of 25,000 calendars for 1977 was sold out, so the print order for 1977 has been substantially increased."*

\**"In December 1975, the Grapevine reached an all-time high paid circulation of 83,000. At our estimated pass-along rate of three readers per copy, this means more than 250,000 people read the Grapevine every month." This report would have us believe that one thousand subscriptions sold from Dec. 1975 to April 1<sup>st</sup> 1976, that's three months, or eleven subscriptions per day increase.*

Since that time, our magazine has floundered. I have Conference reports for the past eighteen years and the information is most enlightening. It was reported that in 1991 subscriptions were at 130,737. Our most recent report for 2009 puts our subscriptions at 94,329. That is over 35 thousand subscriptions that have been lost over those eighteen years. That calculates out to over two thousand lost subscriptions per year for that time period. If we look at just the past five years we have only lost 702 subscriptions, but when we look at last year by itself subscriptions were down by 3,514. That's about ten subscriptions per day. Where is the leak? Why are we losing so many subscriptions? Why don't members of Alcoholics Anonymous support their own magazine? Why don't members of Alcoholics Anonymous pay a little more

attention to the greater A.A.? Why does A.A. have the Grapevine anyway? Only a small portion of us read it.

The answer is in the magazine's Statement of Purpose: Bill's own words, "**The Grapevine will try to carry the A.A. message to alcoholics and practice the A.A. principles in all its affairs.**" From the A.A. Service Manual, Bill's 1951 article, A.A.'s Legacy of Service, he starts out by writing, "**Our Twelfth step — carrying the message --- is the basic service that the A.A. fellowship gives; this is our principle aim and the main reason for our existence.**" Have we decided to hell with Bill and his idea that the Grapevine could "carry the message"? I don't think we are there yet, but we are close. When asked during a Young People's Roundtable discussion at the recent NERAASA held in Niagara Falls: "Why don't young people buy the magazine?" One of the responses was, "Why, It's lying around everywhere. If I want one, I just pick it up and take it." I have to admit my part in that. I have bought the magazine for the majority of my time here in Alcoholics Anonymous. I have bought it to support it. I don't read it thoroughly and I am quick to send them into the prisons with someone that is doing that kind of service. I am doing two things. First, I am helping to carry the message by providing the magazines, and secondly, I am flooding the market with timeless material that appears to be hurting the sale of our magazine. Good, Bad, or Indifferent. I don't know, but I do know of personal stories where people have told me how the Grapevine has helped them. And that tells me that the magazine is doing twelfth step work. It is doing its job. The problem must be elsewhere. More magazines than Drunks? I don't think so. I think the problem lies with the messenger, not the message. When was the last time you thought about writing an article? If you did, it would increase the interest by a few people. If everyone that could write an article did, it would increase circulation by a lot. How about the GV rep. at your Homegroup? My Homegroup does not have one at this time and hasn't for some time now.

The pamphlet The AA Group, Where it all begins suggests that each group should have a Grapevine Rep. "to familiarize members with the fellowship's international journal, and the

enhancements to sobriety it offers through articles written by AA members, based upon their personal experiences in recovery.” In 1980 it was reported by the Conference Grapevine Committee as a recommendation that: **“Delegates continue their efforts in using the Area and District service structure to achieve the goal of a Grapevine Representative in every group.”** Oh! Wait a minute; I think I am getting the picture here. It’s like a group not having a General Service Representative. There is no way for a group to be properly informed of the goings on at the General Service Board. We just let it happen. So, it’s not the Grapevines fault after all. It’s the same **old** problem. Our membership is **not** supporting the “Greater A.A.” It is evident, if we look at the lack of participation at this Area Assembly. A conservative estimate would be five hundred groups, and we get maybe sixty-five Group Service Reps. I think I have seen eighty once. Grapevine representation is even less than that.

Drawing from A SUMMARY: ADVISORY ACTIONS OF THE GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS 1951-1993 I was able to recognize that most of the recommendations reported by the Conference Grapevine Committee during this period were about gaining more subscriptions, and in some cases, I believe, even revolting. For example; **1962 “Grapevine subscriptions for newcomers are recommended as a useful tool of sobriety; subscriptions to be entered automatically for each newcomer who may reimburse the group when he can.” “Grapevine representatives will aim for 100% subscriptions in their groups, with follow-up on expiration to insure 100% renewals.”** So much for “The only requirement being----” It seems like the tail wagging the dog.

How, then, can we poll the membership, invite discussion on whether or not the fellowship wants to pay the price and carry on, providing what service it does provide, at such a high cost? Or, would we rather redesign the Grapevine for today’s A.A.? Meaning, something we can afford, and still carry the AA message. Referring to the third legacy of service, Bill writes in A.A. Comes of Age Pg. 140 **“Regarding any particular service, we need to ask only one question: “Is this or that service really needed?” If it is not, then let it be eliminated. But if it**

**is needed, then maintain it we must or fail in our mission to those who seek A.A.**” I would say that the service is needed, so the question becomes, how then do we do it? Here are a few suggestions:

- Could the Grapevine return to a type of newsletter? Printing maybe one good story, some news from around A.A. and possibly a question and answer section?
- Could the Grapevine possibly merge somehow with Alanon’s FORUM and an Alateen production to produce a magazine geared to the family disease?
- Could we possibly charge enough for just the magazine, without producing all the Drunk Junk?
- Could we muster enough Grapevine Reps. that in turn would generate enough subscriptions, which could support the Grapevine? And for how long would that last??
- Should Area 47 buy subscriptions to be given away?
- Could we produce 90,000 magazines and then sell them till their gone without doing all this predicting and budgeting that proves to be so costly?
- Would everyone that could buy the magazine suddenly start buying them? And if they did, what would we do with them all? They are already “Lying Around Everywhere”.

So, what have we determined? The problem is with the membership. It is the same problem that is affecting the General Service Process. The Groups have these responsibilities to the Greater A.A. and the membership won’t fulfill them. Concept One: **The final responsibility and the ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole fellowship.** Collective conscience? That means all the groups in Central New York. Tradition One suggests that each member belongs to a group, and Tradition two suggests that

each member is responsible to participate in the group conscience. It would seem to me, that if these things are not being done the problem lies with sponsorship. It is my fault.