

About AA

Grapevine: A Mirror of A.A. Today

Grapevine is the A.A. Fellowship's principal magazine, with current circulation of about 100,000 around the world. It was started by a group of six volunteers in June 1944 as a newsletter for A.A.s in the New York City area, but immediately reached a wider readership when the editors sent free copies to A.A.s serving in the armed forces during World War II. In 1945, the groups in the U.S. and Canada voted it their A.A. magazine, and soon it became known as the international monthly journal of Alcoholics Anonymous.

At the heart of Grapevine, as it was in the beginning, are first-person stories sharing the experience, strength and hope of A.A. members. Publishing between 250 and 300 new stories a year, Grapevine provides an up-to-date picture of the A.A. Fellowship, with a wide variety of articles covering every aspect of living sober in today's world.

Through the pages of Grapevine, A.A. members, prospective A.A. members, and those professionals interested in A.A. can find a wide-angled view of the Fellowship and, through the eyes of its members, glimpse some of the issues presently facing Alcoholics Anonymous. Often referred to as a "meeting in print," many readers have found it to be a lifeline bridging the difficult gap between a treatment center or correctional facility and life on the outside. For A.A. loners around the world; for those who are homebound, disabled, or incarcerated; or for those who have no access to an A.A. group, it can serve as a connecting thread to the A.A. principles of recovery. In Grapevine pages many alcoholics first recognize themselves, and the glimpse of reality they see is a reflection of the life-saving communication at the heart of A.A.'s program of recovery — the communication between one alcoholic and another.

The A.A. Experience

For professionals who endeavor to help alcoholics, grasping the concepts, methodology and lingo of Alcoholics Anonymous can be challenging. Grapevine can help, providing a close-up look at how A.A. works.

Available by subscription and in numerous institutions and correctional facilities, "Grapevine is a friendly messenger of A.A.," says Linda Chezem, J.D., former trial judge, nonalcoholic friend of A.A., who currently teaches at both Purdue University and Indiana University. "I use the magazine for help in explaining about A.A. to justice system staff," she notes. "I suggest that jail personnel read A.A.'s 'meeting in print' to gain a better understanding of the universality of alcohol problems and how A.A. can help." Additionally, the former judge leaves copies of Grapevine in the waiting room at the local jail, for families to read while waiting for visitation time.

With a Spanish-language edition — La Viña — available for the Fellowship's growing Hispanic population, Grapevine and La Viña

articles cover the same range of topics found in a typical meeting — "war stories" of the drinking days; the struggle with, and acceptance of, alcoholism; the importance of meetings, sponsorship, and service; staying sober through bad times and good; and insight into the heart of the A.A. program. And because every issue contains so many of the elements fundamental to ongoing sobriety, articles show how the program of recovery works, not in theory but in practice. As one counselor puts it, "Reading Grapevine enables me to participate vicariously in the A.A. experience. As a result, I am better able to help my clients." Says another, noting how many professionals see only the desperate, crisis-filled side of active alcoholism, "By exposing myself to the stories of well alcoholics — knowing what it was like, what happened, and what it is like now with them — I am far more understanding and knowledgeable when it comes to providing guidance."

'An Honest Publication'

According to Carvel Taylor-Valentine, there is yet another benefit that Grapevine provides in her practice: "I have been an addiction counselor and social worker since 1972. For years I worked with all sorts of employee assistance problems. Of course, a major difficulty was alcoholism — with alcoholics themselves and with their families. I always gave people a packet of information about the disease, and always strongly recommended A.A. and, of course, Al-Anon, a separate fellowship for family members and friends. I always explained that my job was to help them make a decision for sobriety, with A.A. at the center of that decision. I said that I could walk the path with them for a period of time but that A.A. would always be there wherever they were.

"Grapevine was an important part of my strategy, but not in the way one would expect. Instead of giving a copy to my client, I asked them to find one for themselves and to bring back a copy for me. I knew that most active alcoholics wouldn't read it if I gave it to them in their packet. But if I gave them an assignment to go to a meeting and specifically find Grapevine they would do it and then read it. This usually worked.

"Grapevine is never out of date," she says. "I've had a couple of copies from over a year ago that I just gave to a client's family member. Grapevine is one of those publications that is consistently hopeful about the benefits of sobriety and of living life to the fullest. I am so very happy to be able to use such an honest publication in my practice."

A Changing Universe of Alcoholics

Grapevine today reaches a population of recovering alcoholics that is dramatically different from the A.A. population of the early 1940s.

Today the Fellowship is made up of many more young people, people in their early teens and twenties; the number of women has increased to almost 35% of the total A.A. population; and many minority groups and language groups are represented throughout A.A.

Technology, too, has changed, and where A.A.'s early members used nickels and dimes for telephone calls to keep themselves connected in between A.A. meetings, today's members find themselves in the midst of a digital revolution where information, communication, and the A.A. lifeline is available 24/7 at the click of a mouse.

Originally a print publication, Grapevine has been reaching out to this new audience through a variety of platforms and formats designed for today's technology. A digital edition of the magazine now joins the print version, a monthly audio magazine, and an informative Web site (www.aagrapevine.org) featuring a comprehensive online archive containing every Grapevine article, letter, joke and cartoon in the magazine's history, including more than 3,000 articles about A.A. history and its founders.

A Rich Resource

The archive of material that Grapevine has developed over the years includes many contributions from nonalcoholic professionals — doctors, counselors, members of the clergy, corrections personnel and others — who have shared their experience with alcoholism, alcoholics, and the A.A. program. Particularly in A.A.'s pioneering time, an esteemed collection of professional men and women provided critical knowledge and support as A.A. grew in its ability to help the suffering alcoholic. The contributions of Dr. William Silkworth in articulating alcoholism as an allergy to alcohol coupled with an obsession to drink helped to set A.A. co-founder Bill W. on the road to recovery; Sister Ignatia, a nurse at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron, Ohio, along with co-founder Dr. Bob S., ministered to literally thousands of drunks as they sobered up on the alcoholism ward she established in that city; Warden Clinton Duffy, a giant in the corrections field, established A.A. in California's San Quentin prison, paving the way for thousands of incarcerated alcoholics to get help. The experience of these and many other nonalcoholic professionals throughout the years provide a rich resource for A.A. members and those interested in its program of recovery.

A Labor of Love

Writing for Grapevine has always been a labor of love for A.A. members, and day after day, week after week, manuscripts stream into Grapevine's office unsolicited. They come from A.A. members who have something to say — something about their sobriety, about practicing a particular aspect of the program, about getting or losing a sponsor, or the feelings of isolation and loneliness that can follow alcoholics into the new life that A.A. offers, often expressing immeasurable gratitude for their hard-won sobriety.

Guided by A.A.'s Twelve Traditions, the time-tested set of principles essential to A.A. unity and survival, Grapevine does very few things that mainstream magazines do on a regular basis. Grapevine does not accept advertising — unusual for a publication that has survived for over 65 years; it has no staff writers, no celebrity colum-

nists — its A.A. writers remain anonymous; all material is submitted on a voluntary basis — including articles or pieces from nonalcoholic experts and professionals in the field; it makes no political (or other) endorsements, opposes no one, takes no stand on outside issues, expresses no editorial opinion on matters of politics, religion or the treatment of alcoholism.

Yet Grapevine echoes an openness fundamental to A.A.'s program of recovery. With A.A. membership open to all problem drinkers who have a desire to stop drinking, Grapevine reflects all the opportunity and diversity that suggests.

An Unexpected Dividend

For professionals like Linda Chezem and Carvel Taylor-Valentine, who treat, counsel, or even incarcerate alcoholics, getting to know how the A.A. Fellowship works can be an important development, both professionally and on a personal basis. Through her experience dealing with active alcoholics in the judicial system, Linda Chezem developed a profound belief in the A.A. program. "That belief," she says, "grew from people who wrote me letters of amends after I sent them to jail, from seeing sober members of A.A. give their time to bring meetings to prisons, and from the hard work and productivity of those in the community who were sober, thanks to the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous."

An unexpected dividend for one physician has been "the ability to get in touch with my feelings about alcoholics and also to stimulate my personal growth as a human being. I've discovered that there is a lot to be gained by trying to incorporate the Twelve Steps of A.A. into my own life. Recently, I've realized that by reading the stories of alcoholics who have literally gotten their lives back in A.A., I have been able to make contact with my spiritual self."

In the often-challenging world of alcoholism treatment and recovery, Grapevine can provide a gentle introduction to A.A. principles, offering a deep resource of personal stories illustrating the A.A. program in action, and giving voice to the extraordinary diversity of Alcoholics Anonymous. today.

For additional information about how professionals can use the Grapevine and La Viña in their work with alcoholics, see "Welcome, Professionals" on the Grapevine Web site (www.aagrapevine.org/for/pros) or contact the Grapevine at 475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1040, New York, NY 10115.

How Can A.A. Help You?

Would you be interested in having an A.A. presentation at one of your professional gatherings? Or would you like information about recovery from alcoholism in A.A.? If so, please contact the C.P.C. desk at the General Service Office, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, or cpc@aa.org. We welcome your questions, comments and requests.

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