

It is all about change! The evolution of the Grapevine

September 2005 presentation by Area 64 GV Chair at Area Convention

The Grapevine was born from an idea, an identified need, and hard work and perseverance by a few people. It has evolved over the years and experienced many changes since its introduction into the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. By the early 1940s AA was growing fast and there was a need for communication and a feeling of connection. There were no means for AA members to communicate with each other; groups from one part of the country did not know how other groups conducted business, and there were no AA publications besides the Big Book and one or two pamphlets.

Recognizing this communication gap, six AA members in the New York area — four women and two men, published the first issue in June 1944 with the blessings of AA's co-founder Bill W. In the September 1944 issue, one AA suggested that special groups be formed for "older members" — old-timers with one or two months of sobriety. A copy of that first issue, a magazine entitled The Grapevine, was sent to every AA group — about 300 at the time — and to all known AA members in the armed services overseas, who began calling the Grapevine their "meeting in print." The title stuck, and today it is widely known as a "meeting in print." The Grapevine and La Viña carry it on their covers.

By the fourth issue, the magazine began printing this description of itself under the masthead:

A monthly Journal devoted to those seeking further knowledge on the problem of alcoholism, in the hope that it may prove a unifying bond to all alcoholics everywhere. Individual opinions expressed here are not, necessarily, those of AA as a whole.

The Grapevine was in fact appealing to "alcoholics everywhere" and in 1945, at the request of the groups; it became the national journal of Alcoholics Anonymous. Four years later, when the Grapevine's readership had expanded to include members in Canada and Europe, the designation was changed to the international journal of Alcoholics Anonymous. Today the AA Grapevine is the international journal of Alcoholics Anonymous.

In 1946, the Grapevine became one of the two publishing arms of the Alcoholic Foundation. During this incorporation, Bill W. summed up his vision of the Grapevine. ". . . The Grapevine will be the Voice of the Alcoholics Anonymous movement. Its editors and staff will be primarily accountable to the AA movement as a whole. . . . Within the bounds of friendliness and good taste, the Grapevine will enjoy perfect freedom of speech on all matters directly pertaining to Alcoholics Anonymous The Grapevine will be a newspaper written by AAs and friends of AA. Like the Alcoholics Anonymous movement it is to mirror, there will be but one central purpose: 'The Grapevine will try to carry the AA message to alcoholics and practice the AA principles in all its affairs.'" ("AA Grapevine History," p. 4.)

In 1948, the Grapevine changed its format from a three-column newsletter to its present digest size. Over the years, the number of pages in the Grapevine ranged from eight in the first eighteen issues to its current length of sixty-four pages. It also ran to thirty-two and forty-eight pages in length during periods in-between. Color appeared gradually. An outstanding example was the full-color reproduction of "The Man on the Bed" painting, commissioned by the Grapevine for the centerfold of the December 1955 issue. While the

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pages inside remained black and white, the first full-color cover appeared on the June 1989 issue, and most covers have been full-color ever since.

Throughout its history the Grapevine has been the forum for new ideas. It was the vehicle by which Bill introduced the Twelve Traditions in a series of articles culminating in April 1946 when the Grapevine published Bill's article "Twelve Points to Assure Our Future." In June 1947, the Grapevine helped clarify what AA was all about with the publication of the AA Preamble. Through the Grapevine, the Traditions, as well as many other issues, got a thorough airing. Members could now use the magazine to express their ideas, which they did willingly and freely. Although Bill W. contributed heavily, the magazine has always been and will always be primarily the voice of the individual AA member. The Grapevine carries the experience, strength, and hope of countless recovering alcoholics. It is one drunk talking to another. In 1995, a Spanish-language magazine, *La Viña*, was approved for production because a need was identified. As the magazine continues to evolve, the Steps, the Traditions, the Preamble, the Serenity Prayer, and the Responsibility Declaration, all appear in the magazine on a regular basis. Add the first-person stories of members, and the Grapevine truly has become "Our Meeting in Print."

A new executive editor was hired in 2001 in an effort to reverse the trend of declining subscriptions. With that came a new philosophy and enthusiasm for the magazine and the board elected to adopt for the Responsibility Declaration itself adapted to read: "We are responsible — when anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, we want a copy of the Grapevine always to be within arms reach. And for that: we are responsible." Aggressive attraction strategies were implemented. In an effort to increase interest in the magazine, the Grapevine was redesigned, a new four-color GV catalog and new CDs were produced, a gift edition of *The Best of Bill* was developed and offered to the Fellowship, and the Grapevine website was redesigned to stimulate interest and provide much needed services. Keep coming back until you find out what's in store for next year.

What can you and I do to carry the message and help stimulate interest in the Grapevine? First, we can actively and visibly support the magazine. We can provide information and support to our area's Grapevine representatives. We can carry copies of the Grapevine with us wherever we go and talk about it at any opportunity. We can have more than one subscription. Some say we should have as many Grapevine subscriptions as we have bathrooms in our homes. Others members have as many subscriptions as they are years sober. Others give subscriptions to their doctors, lawyers, or clergy. We can write articles. We can encourage others to contribute. The Grapevine, in addition to being our meeting in print, also makes an excellent Twelfth-Step tool.

I have shared what you can do to carry the message. Now what can I do as an AA member and a trusted servant? When I was introduced to AA Grapevine at an assembly a little over 5 years ago, I had no interest in reading another piece of AA literature. They ask if I was interested in being a pool rep and I thought we were going swimming, so I agreed. As time went on, I became more enthused about the AA Grapevine and as my life in sobriety continues to change I become more eager to carry and read the magazine. Now I carry the Grapevine to read, I carry extra copies to pass on, I carry subscription blanks; I can continue to carry on, carry over, and carry forward the message of the Grapevine. And for that: I am responsible.