

Delegates Report on the 56th General “Service Conference April 2006 New York, NY

Saturday April 22

I have lots of stories to tell about every aspect of the week but I will try to be mindful of your time and only share the highlights. I arrived in NY early in the evening on Friday so I could be ready to go on a tour of AA history sites in NYC at 8:30am on Saturday. The tour was a pre-conference activity organized by the Pacific and East Central Regions. It was marvelous and I have pictures on the display board and on the laptop if you would like to see the locations we visited. The highlight of the tour for me was at 182 Clinton St. where Ebby carried the message to Bill.

We returned to the hotel to go to the hospitality room hosted by the New York City Intergroup. It was wonderful seeing old friends from the GSO and the East Central Region and meeting new friends from all over including my conference buddy Naomi- a lovely lady 35 years sober from Texas.

That evening we had a pre-conference Delegates only meeting where we were welcomed by the Delegate Chair Michael S. Panel 55 Area 14 North Florida. Several panel 55 delegates gave an orientation about the conference process and shared tips with us panel 56's. Then there was open sharing and time for questions and answers. Some quotes from that evening that I have carried with me... **We seek not compromise but certainty**...listen like you have no opinion...I come to the conference informed, not instructed...we only hear the God of our understanding through honest and open debate...if everyone is thinking the same-no one is thinking...open your heart...we tend to vote with our voices instead of our conscience-you do not need to repeat what has already been said... **participation is not only a right (as described in Concept 4) but it is a responsibility.**

Sunday April 23

On Sunday morning I attended a workshop on Remote Communities. Remote Communities are defined as anywhere it is difficult to carry the message due to language, culture and geography. The purpose of this meeting is to create awareness and share common solutions. This workshop is not a part of the conference but has evolved out of delegates from Northern Canada, Alaska and some western states desire to share their experience strength and hope regarding remote communities. This years meeting was a workshop format with those in attendance asked to discuss the definition of remote communities (anywhere it is difficult to carry the message due to language, culture AND geography vs. anywhere it is difficult to carry the message due to language, culture OR geography) and what the delegates would like to see happen with this working group i.e. is it necessary or does this all fall under the realm of PI, CPC and special needs. There was much discussion with the body ultimately decided only that it is important to keep meeting prior to the GSC. This group also publishes the Remote Communities Communicator which is a compilation of reports and presentations from Delegates in areas actively involved in carrying the message to remote communities. It is inspiring to read of the selfless efforts of those AA's who travel many hundreds of miles using every form of transportation imaginable to reach out to those who still suffer. The lessons learned as they enter cultures vastly different from their own filled me with awe at the power of AA in action. There

is much to consider in this area as we all must look around our home groups and ask “Who is missing?” “Who is not represented?”

After lunch with the East Central Region Trustee Bob M. and the other 13 ECR delegates it was time for the opening of the conference.

The first General Service Conference, Panel #1 was held in 1951 as Bill and Dr. Bob's proposed solution to long term control of Alcoholics Anonymous. Through the conference the founders delivered the legacy of service to the entire membership. It was evolved not to govern but as the vehicle through which the AA groups would be the governing influence on all of AA's affairs.

The conference now consists of the:

- twenty-one members of The General Service Board, (seven class A, non-alcoholic trustees and fourteen class B, alcoholic trustees), three non trustee AA World Service directors, three non trustee Grapevine directors (19.9%),
- sixteen members of the General Service Office staff (11.8%) and
- ninety three delegates (68.4%) from the United States and Canada. A total of one hundred and thirty six voting members for this years fifty-sixth General Service Conference.

There are now eight regions and ninety-three delegate areas in the combined United States and Canada. Our region, the East Central Region, is the one of the largest with fourteen delegate areas.

Each delegate is assigned to a conference committee. There are thirteen conference committees, each of which consist of either eight or nine delegates and are assisted by one member of the General Service Office staff and a secretary. The assignments are drawn from the hat late in December prior to the conference. I was assigned to the Grapevine Committee at the 56th General Service Conference and also served as a member of the Archives Committee. Nearly all matters before the conference are handled through the committee system to insure that the greatest number of matters can be dealt with in the six day conference schedule. After each committee considers the items before it, its recommendations are presented to the conference as a whole for acceptance or rejection. The final order of business for the conference is the consideration of floor actions which have been submitted in writing during the conference.

Conference business is conducted under a modified system of Robert's Rules of Order. The major difference being the use of two' thirds majority and the consideration of minority opinions.

The Chairman of the Board Class A (non-alcoholic) Leonard Blumenthal opened the conference. After welcoming remarks Greg M., the General Manager of the General Service Office called the roll. It was thrilling to answer “present” when my name was called. That this drunk who was so broken and had no integrity or self –respect 17 years ago could be in this room serving AA in a position of trust is truly a powerful demonstration of God. I felt the presence of my Higher Power in the conference room all week long.

The keynote address by Class B trustee Bob P discussed our conference theme starting with how Ebby took action and spent money to carry the message and “established the principle that AA in action calls for the sacrifice of much time and little money.” Money and spirituality were mixed from the beginning. He also discussed the spiritual rewards of service as well as self support; how “his contributions to the basket are a spiritual experience in knowing that the money he puts in the basket is going to help someone reach us.”

After a review of conference procedures and a discussion of housekeeping issues we split into committees and each committee met with its corresponding trustees committee. As a member of the Grapevine Committee we met with the Grapevine board of directors and they shared their report with the committee and opened the floor for questions.

Our meeting ended just ten minutes before I was to meet my sister sponsee who was my guest at the opening banquet and AA meeting that evening. I met Nicole and then changed *very quickly* for the banquet. We had a great AA meeting with five short mini-leads and then it was off to bed.

Monday April 24

I started my day off with a walk and then attended the Serenity group. At 9:00am committee sessions began and continued until noon. After lunch we listened to Area highlights from panel 56 delegates and then had various reports followed by questions and sharing. I went to the mike for the first time with some questions and had to say the serenity prayer, my heart was pounding so hard. One of the most interesting reports was class A trustee Vince Keefe’s finance presentation. I would like to review this presentation with you at our June Assembly.

Immediately after this it was time for the ECR panel 56 delegates to share our Area highlights with the conference. Then we had dinner followed by more presentations, questions and discussion and closed with an open sharing session. A few quotes...”we do not have to see eye to eye to walk hand in hand” “the overall membership of AA is decreasing relative to the population of North America” “each member must take ownership of AA”. Time flew and it was soon 10:00 and time for my evening walk and then to bed.

Tuesday April 25

I started my day with a walk to Central Park. Committee meetings started at 9:00 am and again ran until noon. Some committees had extra meetings and some finished early. Grapevine finished up with ten minutes to spare. I felt good about my committee. It was well run, every member was prepared and we had spirited debate on numerous issues sometimes with members playing devil’s advocate just to be certain that we were considering every possible viewpoint on an issue. Of course, that is impossible but we worked hard and came to consensus.

After lunch we had presentations followed by questions and sharing. The most compelling thing I heard during this session was the question...”if not me, who? If not now, when?” Then we took off on the subway to visit the General Service Office and the Grapevine offices. Tuesday evening we had a delegates only dinner followed by the second delegate’s only meeting. As only a group of AAs can we quickly embroiled ourselves in a sticky issue and parliamentary

rabbit hole but we finally managed to extricate ourselves. Good lessons and practice for the upcoming voting sessions on the floor of the conference. After this a number of us went to the AA meeting across the street at St. Malachi's and heard a wonderful AA talk.

Wednesday April 26

I started my day off with a walk to get my breakfast and then attended the Serenity Group. Our morning session was a workshop on "Passing It On In A Changing World" followed by more highlights from Panel 56 delegates. We met again as a region for lunch and this time our GSO regional correspondent, Julio joined us.

After lunch the conference convened and elections were held for Eastern Canada and Pacific Region trustee positions. This was followed by presentations, questions and sharing.

Dinner this evening was a working dinner as this is a secondary committee, Archives meets with the trustees committee and conducts its business. It was fascinating to learn more about Archives and the issues at stake. It was at this meeting that I was elected delegate chair of the Archives committee for the 57th General Service Conference.

After dinner the conference again convened and the committees began to present their reports and recommendations for the conference as a whole to vote on. The archives committee had another meeting to revise an additional consideration but I still made it to the Stardust for ice cream with the East Central Region. Fell into bed well past my usual bed time!

Thursday April 27

After a quick walk for breakfast the conference opened with more committee reports. In the afternoon there was a presentation on "AA Around the World". Dorothy W. trustee at large and Doug R. GSO staff person on the International desk gave inspiring presentations about how North America 12 steps other countries through county to country sponsorship. There was not a dry eye in the house as Dorothy described how the women surrounded her at a zonal meeting in Central America. Dorothy sharing..."Is this a changing world? Yes, we have a spiritual experience and we are not the people we once were!" Doug shared how sponsorship, service and self-support all require self sacrifice and reminded us that "AA's hand is *your* hand."

Committee reports continued until 10:00pm with only a short break for dinner.

Friday April 28

A quick walk for breakfast and then I attended the final meeting of the Serenity Group. It did not seem possible that the conference was almost over. Today's conference session started with a presentation by our new archivist, Amy Filiatreau (Amy is a non alcoholic) who moved us all as she shared the impact of alcoholism on her family and the story of her father's recovery when she was very young. Amy is a highly qualified professional archivist who has a real heart for Alcoholics Anonymous. She then played a recording of Bill speaking about our service structure and the third legacy in 1954. Bill described the development of the Third Legacy saying "This struggle, to see whether this movement would always be headed by a self-perpetuating hierarchy of old timers, or whether these affairs, so vital to the welfare of A.A. all over the world, should be turned over to you....this conference of delegates shall hereafter be the custodians of and the

guardians of our traditions. This is yours. This is the remainder of our Third Legacy. Will you accept it? ...to you we hand the last torch. Carry on. Face your destiny with surety and courage, and God love you.” Wow, what a moment to hear Bill speak. Amy’s presentation was followed by questions and sharing and then the committee reports and voting resumed.

The conference business concluded at 4:08 pm and was followed by sharing from the panel 55 delegates. How lucky I was to serve with this wonderful group of people. Class A trustee, Leonard Blumenthal ended the conference at 5:30pm and in his closing remarks talked about how we need to support ourselves in body, mind and spirit so that we are able to serve. Finally we heard the serenity prayer in Spanish, French, English and Japanese. Once again I am reminded that to those whom much has been given, much is expected.

A bunch of us went out for pizza and then decided to take the subway to Battery Park and ride the Staten Island Ferry to see the Statue of Liberty. We stopped for dessert and then finally back to the hotel and bed!

Saturday April 29th

The conference met for breakfast and to hear the two rotating trustees give their farewell talks. This was followed immediately by a bus trip to Stepping Stones, Bill and Lois’ home in Bedford Hills about an hour north of the city. Again I had goose bumps as I sat at the kitchen table where Ebby twelve stepped Bill and then while sitting at Bill’s desk in his studio Wit’s End and then again when I saw the letter Dr. Jung sent to Bill about his hand in the development of AA through his treating of Rowland and his thoughts on alcoholism.

As I reflect on the conference experience I am overwhelmed with love for AA and amazed at how much there is to learn and how much we have to do. Participating in the conference where “loving discussion” was not a sarcastic commentary –code for fighting, but what truly took place. The vast majority of issues were voted on unanimously with only one committee recommendation turned down by the conference floor. The minority opinion prevailed when the conference voted to discontinue the pamphlet”Letter to a Woman Alcoholic”. God was present and despite the many challenges we face I feel confident that with our Higher Power we will meet them and continue to carry the message to those still stumbling in darkness.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve.