



The Eighty - Three

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Area 83 Archives Newsletter

Our Area 83 history through the eyes of those before us... A legacy of gratitude

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When I came to Alcoholics Anonymous in 1988 my sponsor told me that I needed "to take actions that I didn't believe in, in order to achieve results that would far exceed my expectations." Since it was obvious that he did not appreciate my greatness, I kindly explained that I didn't want to come early, make coffee, set up the chairs, nor feel like standing at the door and to greet and ask people how they were doing. Less kindly, he explained that he did care how I felt and to do it. Thus was my reluctant introduction to service.

Over the years, again with great reluctance, after having experienced many times the failure of trying to do A.A. my way and living through the accompanying pain, there have been moments of clarity, almost a spiritual experience, where it became apparent that the easier, softer way to do things, including service was to surrender my will to Alcoholics Anonymous and service, the way that those who came before had done it. Listen and learn, learn to listen.

As service in sobriety progressed at the Group and District level, the privilege occurred for me to serve in the position of District Committee Member in Area 83. Following that two year term, my Service Sponsor told me to let my name stand at the Area level and let my Higher Power

decide what would happen. Given the size of my ego, I knew that I was destined for greatness at the front of the room - Delegate, Trustee, the sky was the limit. My Higher Power had other plans and I was graced with the opportunity to serve the fellowship in two year terms as CPC, PI and then Corrections Chair, acquiring a tremendous amount of knowledge about the Service Manual, the Traditions, the Concepts, General Service and the General Service Office. Of course, it was still frequently tempting to attempt to do things 'my way for the good of the Fellowship.'

For whatever reason one Saturday, in April of 2010, it seemed like a good idea to drive the 90 kilometres to Peterborough, Ontario to attend the 5th Annual Archives Workshop service day. This despite the fact that I had always secretly felt that Archives was not a real A.A. Service Committee and was somewhat a waste of time. I didn't see its purpose.

At some point during the workshops, perhaps during the visit to an archives preservation site at the Peterborough Museum, my 'contempt prior to investigation' was overcome and I was bitten by the archives bug. If you have become passionate about some aspect

Of Special Interest

See the Archivist's Blog:
[http://
area83archivist.blogspot.com/](http://area83archivist.blogspot.com/)

Contributions to 'The Eighty -
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of service in Alcoholics Anonymous you know what I mean.

A couple of years later when I let my name stand for the position of Area 83 Archives Chair, I was fortunate enough to be elected. It is a good thing that I was able to overcome my contempt because it enabled me to learn that *it was our co-founder, Bill W., who in the early 1950's came up with the idea of organizing our historical records for the benefit of those who came after.* I was among the many that came after, arriving in 1988. Thank goodness for Bill's foresight.

Here are three quotes, by our co-founder Bill W., from the A.A. Archives Workbook:

"Every one of the new and unexpected developments (in A.A.) has, lying just underneath, an enormous amount of dramatic incident and experience – stories galore."

"The hard thing to lay hold of is the atmosphere of the whole proceedings and anecdotal material that will make the early experience alive."

"... the G.S.O. archivists and trustees serving on Archives Committee of the General Service Board and encouraged the importance of archival service, which is vital to the survival of the fellowship.."

Archives' is vital to the survival of the fellowship! And I might have missed it, through ignorance, prejudice and judgement, another self imposed crisis.

The reason for this story is that we are a society of story tellers. We communicate by telling of experience: when drinking, getting sober and in the present. Half of our basic text, the book Alcoholics Anonymous published in 1939 is stories. In fact, other than updating the Preface and adding a new Foreword to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Editions, the only portion of the book which has been altered is the three parts of the Personal Stories, in an attempt to keep the stories current with the changing face of the fellowship, while retaining the flavour of some of the founding members.

The reasoning is explained on page 29, Chapter 2 'There is a Solution' of the Big Book: "*Further on, clear-cut directions are given showing how we recovered. These are followed by forty-three personal experiences.*

"Each individual in the personal stories describes in his own language and from his own point of view the way he established his relationship with God."

Alcoholics Anonymous was well established long before I arrived in 1988. Through many trials and tribulations we have, as a society of contrarians, survived and even prospered. We are constantly evolving. The Twelve Traditions were created from our mistakes and stumbles, to save us from ourselves while remaining unified. The Twelve Concepts for World Service is a group of principles which made the membership responsible for itself and the service structure responsible to those that it serves.

We have no rules, and if we did no one would follow them. No one can tell anyone else what to do, nor make them do anything. You are a member if you say you are. We are led but not governed by trusted servants who are part of a reverse pyramid organizational structure in which the further you go in service, the further down the organization you are listed as you progress to become more of a trusted servant of A.A. Trusted to put the best interests of Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole above all else.

Alcoholics functioning as trusted servants, guided by principles, in order to serve others. This does not sound like my drinking days.

How did we get here?

Much the same as we share our experience, strength and hope with a newcomer one-on-one, we as society have the experience of those who went before both good and bad, successful and unsuccessful to which we can refer. We are at liberty to make the same mistakes over and over or to learn from our past.

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Archives is the history of our past to which we can refer if we so choose.

It has been said many times before that the only two things which the members of Alcoholics Anonymous don't like, the way things are and change.

It is our responsibility to make sure that Alcoholics Anonymous is available to those whom come after, the way A.A. was available when we arrived. The Area 83 Archives is the source of invaluable information about what came before. What we are doing today, will become an integral part of the Archives, to be used by those who have yet to arrive in A.A.

Part 2: What Does the Area 83 Archivist Do?

The job of the Archivist is to be the primary resource (expert if you will) of all matters dealing with archives for the twenty-two districts in Area 83. In order to do this the Archivist keeps up to date with topics relating to what to collect for the local Archives Committee, how to restore damaged documents (paper, digital tape/magnetic tape, pictures, etc) and generally how to capture the history of each district. This could mean what to do with all the stuff the district archivist has in his 'Box of Stuff' to how to organize, describe and display the material collected. Perhaps each group has a group history prepared or if not, what to do to get the groups to make out their group history, how did the group start,

Our responsibility as Archivists is to document our records of enduring value (historical) for future generations of those to come or those who wish to document the history of AA. AA was identified as one of the most significant spiritual events of the last millennium due to all the other organizations which have used our model of recovery for their own solutions. So it is important for each archive to collect their history to show how they have impacted the local area. Perhaps they were instrumental in helping to start or support a local treatment center or perhaps they were instrumental in carrying the message into hospitals and correctional institutions. To this end, the Area Archivist is there to provide whatever assistance they are requested to provide in order for the Districts to do their job.

Part 3: The Achievements of Archives in Area 83

Sometimes we hear in Alcoholics Anonymous that we stand on the shoulders of giants, although those that we now regard as giants probably did not regard themselves in that fashion at the time they were taking action. We are lucky there are those with foresight, a vision of the future of A.A. who can see what is good for A.A. as a whole. In 2002, two past Delegates, Ray M. and Roy R., were appointed to an Ad Hoc Committee to investigate the creation of Archives as an official committee of Area 83. In 2004, the Area Assembly voted to approve the creation of an Archives Committee and Gord H was elected along with Maire O., who served first as the Archivist for GTA Intergroup and later, in 2007, as the first Area Archivist, recognized the need to preserve our history. Although the History of Archives in Area 83 will be told elsewhere, this is a brief report on what was accomplished in the Area from 2010 to 2012 and stretching into the first part of 2013, building on the vision of those giants.

In A.A. we tell our stories to communicate how the program has worked in our lives. The objective of this story is partly to share our achievements. Another part is to encourage archives committees, whether Group, District or Area to begin where you are, start with what you have.

Area 83 Eastern Ontario International is geographically large and diverse. It stretches from Oakville in the west, based on the north shore of Lake Ontario, the eastern most of the Great Lakes, north to the southern part of that vast wilderness which is Algonquin Park, east to the Ottawa River, along which the voyageurs and loggers trekked as British North America was opened to European exploration and settlement, down the river which also serves as the border between the provinces of Ontario and Quebec to meet the St. Lawrence Seaway, gateway to Great Lakes. It also dips into the north county of New York State, making ours one of the two international areas in North America. We speak French, Spanish, American and Canadian English. We have Districts which require driving two to three hours to visit all six groups depending upon the weather, to a population concentration of approximately 8 million people in the Greater Toronto Area which hosts hundreds of meetings per week.

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Peterborough, the three Districts of Ottawa, and the eight Districts of Toronto have physical archives. The Area does not, although we are fortunate to have an arrangement with GTA Intergroup in Toronto to house our collection.

Over the last two and a half year years GTA Intergroup has acquired a new computer, scanner and software for the use of their Archivist. This has enabled the archives committee to start to digitize the collection. On Sunday afternoons, or whenever the Archivist and members of his committee are available, between one and six volunteers can be seen sorting and cataloguing material from boxes, binders and stashes bringing order to chaos. Wearing gloves to protect sensitive material, our history is lovingly restored and saved. Past minutes of the Area Assembly Meetings and Area Committee Meetings, GTA Intergroup Monthly Meetings are scanned and saved.

This material is then available to those who have a legitimate reason to have access. The GTA Intergroup Archives Committee adopted an Accessibility Policy, based on that used by GSO Archives to protect both the collection and the anonymity of the membership, current and past.

Funds were provided by the membership to build a new, secure display case with proper glass and lighting, and angled shelving to house and display artifacts such as the lamp from The Little Denmark Restaurant where the founders of A.A. in Toronto met for the first time, first edition copies of the Big Book, letters from Bill and Lois. The collection includes fonds from past delegates, Gordon Patrick, non-alcoholic Trustee and Past Chair of the General Service Conference.

In 2012, the Archives Committee began creating a database with the assistance of Katrina R. The aim of this initiative is to provide a format that all the Areas in Canada can use as a template for their individual areas. Already, as a result of a presentation at CERASSA the Quebec and Ontario areas are in favor of cooperating in building a Canadian Archives Association for all the Areas in Canada.

As we move forward, more bridges are being built to other areas and the history of AA in Canada is being developed through these shared experiences.