



Welcome delegates

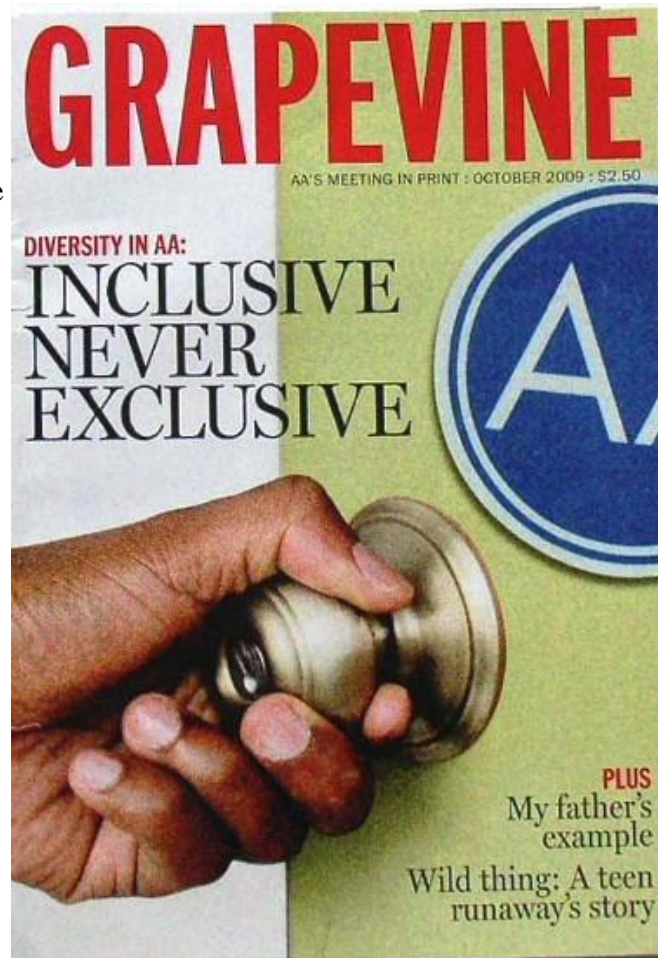
By Joe C. © August 15, 2013, Rebellion Dogs Publishing

Editors Want to Print What You Want to Say.

Have your voice heard if you have something important to say. If there is anything I can offer about what to write, I learned it from my teachers in songwriting. Ralph Murphy, VP of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, is a producer, performer and songwriter himself. He very generously helps emerging artists hone the craft of songwriting. When asked about how to write songs that will be attractive to radio programmers, he says to write what comes from your heart. He has only two suggestions of what not to do, “Don’t bitch and don’t preach.”

That rings true with our experience strength and hope mantra. Whatever fellowship you are part of, the literature is your literature. The magazine, eZine or web-journal is yours, too. I assure you, the editor wants you to have your say as much as you want to be recognized. Their job is to churn out a fresh look at the same old thing with as many points of view as is reasonably possible. Every publication has an editorial style and new writers should learn to accommodate the style. If you do, it makes it easy for editors to see your work in their magazine.

I tend to want to write what hasn’t already been said. When I have an idea, I look for it online. If I can’t add it to my collection or writing because it doesn’t exist, I consider doing it myself. Sometimes, all that is needed is to say something in a way that has never been said. I have been rejected way more



often than I have had the welcome mat rolled out. That's a big part of the life of a writer.

In writing for peer-to-peer fellowships we tend to write in the editorial we or the first person; "My experience with practicing these principles in all areas of my life has been ...," or "Our experience tells us ..." Starting out in a meeting with, "You should ..." won't help build a curious audience. The same consideration is worth bringing to the printed word. No rule is an ultimate rule. In the arts, rules are meant to be broken. There is a time and a place for anything if it is considered timely, helpful and relevant.

Below is a 2009 example that I wrote and The Grapevine published in their December issue. It isn't typical; it is an opinion piece. It happened to be my experience that these were things I was thinking about and the editor thought others would identify. It was well received by some readers and it challenged or offended some others. Editors aren't afraid of controversy. Bad taste is their only enemy.

Overhaul? Can our literature be as cutting edge as it was seven decades ago? By Joe C., Toronto

Maybe our Fellowship is overdue for some neglected renovations. I arrived at the doors of AA in the mid '70s, when the Fellowship had seen journeyman duty through five decades. It became my refuge and now it's my home. Three decades later I wonder, more and more—if AA were a house, what kind of a house would it be? Would it be called a "fixer-upper" by real estate agents putting a positive spin on what might otherwise be termed "in need of meaningful overhaul?" Like a house, if we are to stay safe and inviting, a periodic renovation is needed, as well as staying up to code.

Is AA as effective and relevant today as it once was? Furthermore, will AA be relevant and effective when our children or grandchildren need help? If an ongoing legacy of service is important, what do we have to do now to ensure AA is relevant to the next generation? Maybe some are already retorting, "We don't have to do anything—it is just fine the way it is!"

Around my home group, I often speak about how I think a lot of our literature could be better and open the hearts of more suffering alcoholics. Many young people today don't turn to formal religions for their spiritual answers, often because the formal practices and language seem too antiquated to be relevant. I wouldn't want future suffering alcoholics to forgo AA for the same reasons. Example: At meetings emphatically read from Chapter Five as if to say, Just yesterday, I was working with a newcomer who said to me, "What an order—I can't go through with it." In 32 years, I have never literally heard anyone speak those words. What I have heard is, "Are you out of your mind," or "Whatever!" or "You've got to be kidding me!"

We are a decade into the 21st century and we still have a chapter called, “To Wives.” If your goal is to reach out to the still-suffering, wouldn’t we reach more people and offend fewer if we rewrote it as a new chapter called, “To Loved Ones?” Not everyone who comes here is heterosexual. Not everyone comes from a nuclear family.

Furthermore, even in traditional families, it’s not always the male head of the household that is the problem drinker.

The line “every boy dreams of being our country’s president” made sense for a Fellowship from the middle of last century—male-dominated and not extending past the borders of the United States of America. But today, AA lives in many countries—many without presidents as the head of state, not to mention the obvious patriarchy of the premise of the statement.



Personally, I identify as an agnostic member of AA. In my home group, friends joke that I used to be the apologetic agnostic, and now I am the obnoxious agnostic—always speaking up for the rights of non-believers. The chapter “We Agnostics” can feel patronizing. The sentiment is that atheism or agnosticism is a temporary hold-out for members who will eventually “see the light” and come in line with traditional AA belief.

That’s true for many people but not for everyone. Our book was written by the first members, with only a few years of AA history. Time has shown that there is room for any belief system in our Fellowship, as long as do the work and keep an open mind. Wouldn’t it be refreshing if, in the next writing of Alcoholics Anonymous, this chapter was

written by agnostics and not for agnostics?

I am not suggesting we alter the foundation of our AA home—this is more like a paint job with some energy efficient windows. We all want AA to keep working, keep growing and be more inclusive. To do so, we need to evolve.

Resistance to change in AA is understandable—why mess with success? The AA text and program as is are sufficient for anyone desperate enough to free himself or herself from a “seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.” But how can it be improved and expand its reach?

Our stagnation could mean seeing our Fellowship reduce in size and worse, reduce in relevancy. AA has adapted and it must continue to. In the AA I was introduced to, we smoked during the meetings. IN the '80s church and community centers that housed AA began to change their rules. In the city were I live, non-smoking meetings quickly transformed from a rarity to the norm.

This is one way AA changed to keep pace with the world around us. More and more, I feel that it is time for us to change with the times. I love my program and Fellowship. I love the big Book. But I don't see our text as being above reproach. Its authors foreshadowed evolution: "We realize that we know only a little. ... More will be revealed."

I am not proposing changing the message, just keeping the medium relevant. I just want AA to be relevant when my children or grandchildren need it.

Joe C. Toronto, Ontario

EDITORS NOTE: Over the years AAs have hotly debated whether to update the the books written by Bill W. The General Service Conference discussed changing the Big Book in 1995 and the Twelve and Twelve in 2002, both times voting to keep the basic text as is.

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