



Rebellion Dogs Blog - July 2018

A Resentment & A Coffee Pot: The 2018 AA Membership/Group stats

Our Summer [*Box 4-5-9: News and Notes from the General Service Office of A.A.*](#)ⁱ reports about 15,000 less AAs, year-over-year. Also, of us two million +/- members, we are spread between 2,000 more meeting options than in 2017.

Trends in membership and group totals might reveal changes in AA through the years. People joke, "The only two thing you need to start a new AA group is a resentment and a coffee pot." Of course, new meetings start for a variety of reasons.

Sobriety is dynamic for many of us; if we're doing AA "right," we change. Maybe, we want our group to change, too. Have you ever brought a motion to your home group to change, add or replace a group ritual or reading?

How did it go? What did you do about the outcome?

Yes, groups do change. But it's also not uncommon for the group to resist change and those who championed the change, they either let it go, or they go start a new group "that does things right."

If you follow AA membership trends, you know that AA grew and grew and grew some more; then we stopped growing. We were half a million when I came to my first AA meeting in the 1970s. We doubled to one million before I was six years sober (1,064,784 in 1982) and we doubled again eight years later (2,047,252 in 1990). For 38 years since, we've had flat membership totals, up or down 10% from this two million mark.

The number of groups keep increasing. The last ten years shows that while we had the same population in 2008 as we have today, two million members have



spread out over 7,000 extra groups, growing from 113,168 to 120,300 registered groups in a decade. Looking further back, in 1998 we had just a few less members, but we gathered in only 98,710 groups. The members per group isn't substantially different; 20 members per meeting 30 years ago vs. 17 members per meeting, today.

AA's Annual Group/Member Report, Box 4-5-9

Year	Groups	Members	per Group
1958	7,765	145,830	18.78
1978	33,241	627,021	18.86
1998	98,710	1,988,777	20.15
2008	113,168	2,085,725	18.45
2018	120,300	2,087,840	17.36
2017	118,305	2,103,184	17.70
Year-over-Year	1,995	(15,344)	

History of AA Growth: eighty years of resentments and coffee pots

Meet someone *in the know* about early AA...

Between New York City and San Francisco, for two decades, Jackie B has been a director, playwright, administrator and performing arts producer. Along with her professional endeavors, Jackie is an AA historian. Drawing on her playwright skills, [Recovery Plays by Jackie B](#)ⁱⁱ creates a living connection between the recovery community and the early experience of AAs and our groups.

In 2006 *In Our Own Words: Pioneers of Alcoholics Anonymous* was the first to be created. Jackie's second AA-history play about the Traditions, *Our Experience Has Taught Us* closed after four years of touring, raising \$30,000 for recovery service organizations in the Pacific Southwest. [I Am Responsible](#)ⁱⁱⁱ premiered last year (February 2017). A struggling skeptic newcomer – Joe – wonders if there is a place in AA for his atheism. He talks with Lou at their home group; Lou knows a little something about struggling with, "Do I belong in AA?" Lou was the first African American General Service Conference delegate in 1966-67. In 1951, "Blacks weren't even allowed in the clubhouse," Lou tells our newcomer. "There was only one meeting in Philadelphia he could attend – the inter-racial group."

Jackie B is looking ahead to the [International Conference of Secular AA](#) (ICSAA 2018)^{iv} where she'll be presenting some of her research in a workshop called Underrepresented Populations in AA, Sunday August 26th. Also, in Jackie's foreseeable future, she will be presenting at the [2019 Symposium of AA History](#)^v which, I found announced on the [East Bay AA Intergroup website](#).^{vi}

I note two things: First, the location for Symposium of AA History has been moved from Sedona Arizona to Northern California; secondly, The Bay Area AA seems to have a lot more fun going on than my Toronto Intergroup website; the grass is always greener on the California side of the fence.

I remember learning about early LA group history from the characters in Jackie B's Recovery Plays #2, *Our Experience Has Taught Us: A Sensational History of our Twelve Traditions*. Through the characters, we hear about the second Los Angeles area group starting in early AA. The first group reacted, "You can't do that! We're in charge of AA in California."

If you've been involved in AA-service, this doesn't sound so unbelievable. Sometimes, fear and ego take hold when love and humility ought to be guiding us.


Talking with Jackie by phone, I ask about archives she was drawing upon. Let me share some of those details. If you know Los Angeles history documents and recordings, you know Sybil C.

"From a 1985 speaker tape, Sybil talks about the second LA group starting, "Instead of going down and listening to the speakers at the mother group, [Tex] said 'Why, the

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drunks ought to have a chance to talk. I'm going to start a participation meeting. [...] Tex is starting this group out there in Huntington Park, and the powers that be downtown are saying to me, 'What's your brother up to?' and I said, 'Well he's starting a group out here in Huntington Park.'

'Well, he can't do that!'

'Well, he has!'

'He can't do that, we've incorporated Alcoholics Anonymous in California. That means no one can start a group unless they have our permission.'

So Tex went down there, and [the founders] bawled him out and they said, 'We don't want you here, sir! You came down here a few times, and caught on how to do it, and now you've started a rival group out there in Huntington Park!' 'It's not a rival group,' Tex said. 'We've just got folks who are driving so far from Long Beach to the Friday night meeting, we thought we'd start one halfway [on a different night.] See?' They said, 'No, we don't see! Now our attorney has incorporated Alcoholics Anonymous of California and if you don't fold that group up, we'll sue you and we'll run you out of town, because you are hurting this group!' [...]

And Tex sat down and laughed, and he said 'You might as well try to incorporate a sunset. I'll bet you that in a couple of years, you'll have groups [all over the state] ...'

Group #2 in LA, started by Sybil's brother, Tex, was called the Hole in The Ground. Jackie reports that Matt M (Sybil's sponsee), on the AA History Lovers Yahoo Group elaborated, "Back then, if you started a meeting you owned it. They [LA founders: Cliff W., Frank R. and Mort J.] got furious at Tex A, Sybil's brother, who started the Hole in the Ground Meeting in Huntington park. He told them it was a long rough drive to downtown LA from his home (no freeways back then, no route 10, no route 5)."

"And we know about Clarence in early-day Cleveland," Jackie adds, "Largely from [*How It Worked*](#), by Mitchell K^{vii}," Jackie adds. On pages 150-151, we read, "Clarence was fond of saying 'All you need to start a meeting is a resentment and a coffee pot.' He said felt that if there were any real unity, all that there would be in the world is one very large and boring meeting. He said, 'A.A. didn't start, or grow in unity. A.A. started and grew in riots.'

"Clarence also said, 'When we had our first UNITY in Cleveland, we didn't split into two groups. We did one better. We split into three.'"

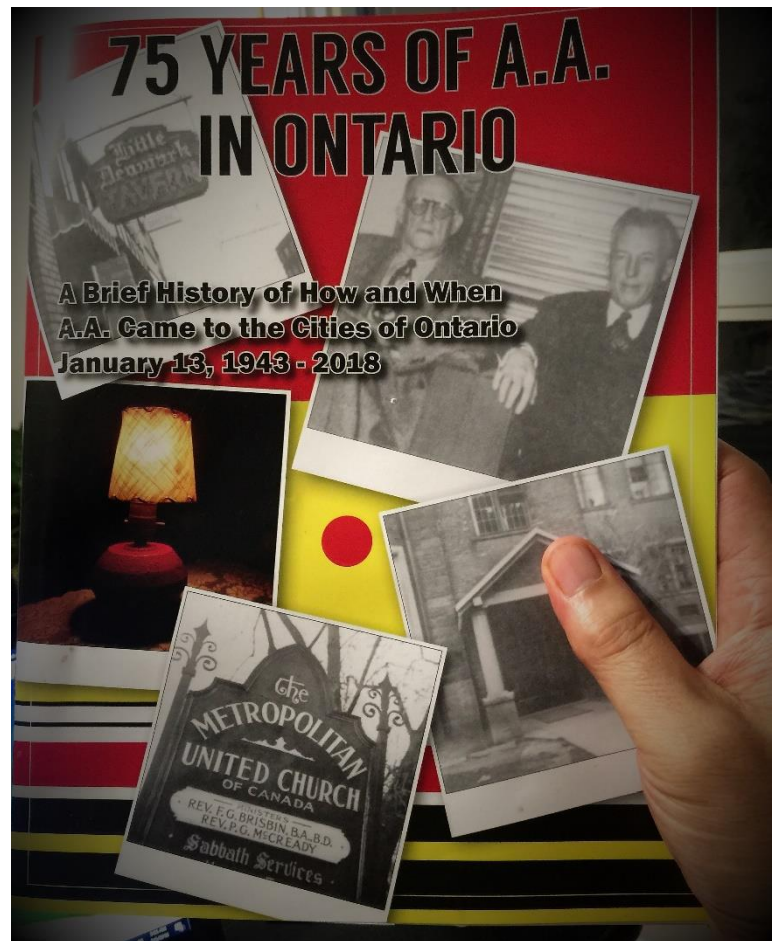
From Akron to Cleveland, from the G. Group to the Borton Group to the Orchard Grove Group, Ohio AA grew the same way it sometimes does everywhere, “Fine then! We’ll go start our own meeting; we’ll show you.”

This year at the Ontario Regional Conference of AA in Toronto, the 24-page glossy booklet, [*75 Years of A.A. in Ontario*](#) was given to attendees. It reports the first Canadian gathering of AA in January 13, 1943 where six alxies and two friends of alxies met at Little Denmark Tavern and Restaurant. Later they moved to a church where six attended the first AA meeting January 28th.

Along the highway from Toronto to Detroit, meetings started in Windsor and London Ontario. More Toronto groups and an AA clubhouse were added. By 1945, meetings were started in Ottawa, Sterling and Hamilton and a Women’s group started in Toronto.

Dorothy C was at the first AA gathering in 1943. The booklet reports, “This fledgling [Women’s] group had only twelve members. Frequently less than eight were in attendance. In 1945, for women, family responsibilities were supposed to come before their own sobriety.

GSO records reports that within ten years (1953), there were 503 AA groups in Canada. The 75th booklet celebrates other firsts through the years, too. Our first correctional meetings (in jails) are recorded, the adventures of Pat, Rubin, Jerry and Dennis – founders of the first young people’s group (1950), the December 1973 first Gay AA, encouraged from a California group, Alcoholics Together (AT). “The name came about because the local intergroup office would not allow the group to be listed as an A.A. group. The Toronto members faced a similar problem here.”



Care to take in a little Canadian AA history next month? ICSAA 2018 Attendees can visit the Friday 5:30 PM open Big Book group called Stained Glass in Trinity Anglican Church where the first Gay meeting was held in Toronto. The church is on the same property as our [Marriott Toronto Easton Centre Hotel](#). "The founding members were David C., Jack M., Kevin B. and Ron P. Combined, they had a total of about 35 years sobriety and were well known in Toronto A.A. and active in their home groups.

"Grupo Nueva Esperanza opened its doors April 24, 1984" as the first Spanish speaking Ontario group. Little known in secular AA circles the booklet reports, "Secular meetings are first documented by Bill W. in *A.A. Comes of Age*. District 22 [Toronto East] Minutes of Sunday September 10, 1995 show in New Business, the formation of We Agnostics, a new group with two founding members."

I never knew about the meeting at the time, or I would have enjoyed going.

AAagnostica.org recently posted [an article from Moncton New Brunswick's Michael](#) who travelled in early sobriety and had gotten to Quad-A meetings in Chicago (AA for atheists and agnostics) and he started what might be Canada's first: "I started to think my home city of Moncton, New Brunswick, needed a similar meeting. With one other member with similar "grievances" we started a secular group in 1992 – the "AA 4AF" group – Alcoholics Anonymous For Atheists, Agnostics and Freethinkers. The group was registered with GSO February 14 with the Service Number 000170694."^{viii}

Michael moved to another town and the meeting didn't last – maybe an idea ahead of it's time for Atlantic Canada.

75 Years of A.A. in Ontario also includes a shout out to the first International Conference of Young People in AA, intentionally held on a border town – Niagara Falls, NY, 1958 – both American and Canadian AA's conspired to put it on. The 60th ICYPAA will be in Baltimore at the end of August. Keep reading for info and a cool, new video from ICYPAA.

The LGBTQ Toronto Gratitude Round Up is recorded in the Ontario history booklet as is the upcoming ICSAA 2018 in Toronto. Kudos to the archivists/editors for remembering that AA's history is still being made and always has been a work-in-progress. The *75 Years of A.A. in Ontario* is quite polite – not much of "the dirt" or the riots that we heard Jackie attribute to Clarence's recollection of AA beginnings.

I recently acquired Quebec's history booklet. *The Beginnings of AA in Quebec: The Charisma of an Ambassador* is published by La Vigne Inc (French Grapevine 2010). This is 82 pages with pics of old Bill W letters and other memorabilia. It also has some of *the*

dirt. The book is mostly about Dave B. Dave wasn't the first AA sobriety in Montreal, but the founding member lost interest and lost contact with New York. When GSO heard from Dave they were happy to pass on a bundle of "please help" letters from 400 fellow Montreal alcoholics. Dave joined AA April 7, 1944. He went to work on the 400 prospects. By 1945 the 28 members meeting at Dave's home needed a bigger space. Montreal growth included growing pains. The Forum, where the Montreal Canadians hockey team played, was renting a hall to AA. "In 1947, when there was about a hundred members, the Forum took back their hall after having discovered that certain members stayed there till three or four in the morning to play cards... Sainte-Mathias group opened so as to better welcome members from the city's west. Preston Hall became home to the first French Canadian group (p. 31)."

According to *La Vigne AA*, Vol 21, no 1, April-May 1985, "In 1949, Montreal had 400 members and 18 AA groups."



We've talked about some of the early Canadian secular AA meetings (agnostics/atheists/freethinkers/humanists/skeptics). It was overseas Buddhists that started the first AA meetings without prayer or gods; the first North American Quad-A (AA for atheists and agnostics) was held in 1975.

At the time of posting the blog, there's just seven weeks to ICSAA 2018, August 24-26 in Toronto. Courtney S of SecularAA.org reports there are currently 451 secular meetings in 363 locations. In 2015, there were 200 worldwide secular meetings, 100 in 2012 and ten years ago, we had about 50 agnostic/atheist groups. Over the last ten years, this subculture has doubled in size, twice. Is the population of natural vs. supernatural worldview holding alcoholics growing? Are non-believers coming out of the closet and saying, "To tell you the truth, I don't believe in a prayer-answering higher power so,

I'm going to stop talking like I do"? Some closet-agnostics/atheist just prefer meetings where they need not self-edit the experience of our recovery.

One thing this rapid growth in secular AA might suggest, along with the overall growth in other new groups, could there be an overall demand for more specialized/ personalized AA? I expect that back-to-basics is growing just as rapidly as secular AA. Some like more of "this" and others need more "that."

We've looked a bit at how meetings/groups got started in different regions and wherever you're from—I'd love to hear the story of your region's early AA. Jump into the discussion.

We've talked about—for lack of a better word—special purpose groups (women, youth, LGBTQ, other-language and secular meetings). If membership numbers stay stagnant and the number of groups keeps getting larger, are we fracturing into more and more special-interest echo chambers?

Speaking of early AA, in 1946 Cleveland, from a club house wall, a poster reflected AA attitudes of the day:

"AA groups are fundamentally little bands of people who are friends, who can help each other to stay sober. Each group therefore reflects the needs of its own members. The way a group is managed is the way its members want it to be managed for their common benefit. As a result, we have large groups, small groups, groups with refreshments, groups which never have refreshments, groups which like long meetings, groups which like short meetings, social groups, working groups, men's groups, women's groups, groups that play cards, groups which specialize in young people and as many other varieties as there are kinds of people. Each group has its own customs, its own financial problems, and its own method of operation. As long as it follows as a group the same principles AA recommends for individuals on unselfishness, honesty, decency and tolerance it is above criticism."^{ix}

This is pre-Twelve Traditions; this is early mid-West AA. Say what?!? Does that sound a little more permissive than your last district General Service meeting? Wouldn't you love this poster hanging on your meeting wall when someone goes all bug-eyed and says, "You can't read that at an AA meeting!" You could just say, "Show me where it says what is forbidden or sacred on the wall... take your time."

The pamphlet "[The AA Group \(P-16\)](#)^x" is worth reading if your home group no longer gets your juices flowing. The pamphlet might give you some ideas for what you like or don't like in a meeting. Maybe you want more structure in your group. Maybe more spontaneity is how you're sobriety roles, today.

HOT OFF THE PRESS: A Resentment and Video Software – starting your own video...

Getting active is going to be a must if you're thinking of starting a new group that better suits your style. AA's young people just put out a video on service (June 20, 2018); Millennials are so You-Tube! It's called [Service is The Secret](#)^{xi} - check it out, it's very contemporary... as always, controversially so. Anyway, here's what Millennials say about running their grandparent's AA. It's 7 ½ minutes.

When I was on the [EastBayAA.org](#) site I noticed things going on in the hood. Camping for Young People, a weekend workshop called, "Legal, Tax, and Insurance Considerations for A.A. Groups," "12th annual Courageous Women in AA," Giants vs. A's baseball outing, 23rd annual LGBT AA at Yosemite, "Unity & Service Conference," "In-Between Fellowship 58th Anniversary (I don't even know?!?!)" and of course – who's coming (I know I am) – Symposium on A.A. History February 1-3, 2019.

Under the East Bay group list, you can shorten your preferences with the following choices of AA Meeting: Fragrance-free, Dual Diagnosis, Cross-dressing permitted, Child-friendly, Living Sober, Smoking permitted, People of Color, Tradition Study, Transgender, Sign Language, Wheelchair Access, Candlelight, Spanish, Cross Talk Permitted and all the other garden-variety speaker, discussion, Big Book, open, closed, Women, Men, secular, Young People, LGBT, etc. Now there a variety of groups who prefer meditation over reading, some have Al-Anon participation, some leave it entirely up to the chair to pick a format.

I expect each of these groups meets the criteria of the 1946, Ohio "What is an AA Group" definition, don't you? We have meetings for AA doctors, lawyers and pilots, too. Fewer of these options were available when I first came around. Maybe the creation of more AA for specific demographics is why our meeting choices keep increasing while our population stays the same. Social media (and other internet sites) has provided AAs and the larger recovery community to commune under any number of umbrellas, too.

I've heard, "If you haven't met anyone you don't like in AA, you haven't been to enough meetings. Maybe if you don't have a group that's just right for you, you haven't started one, yet.

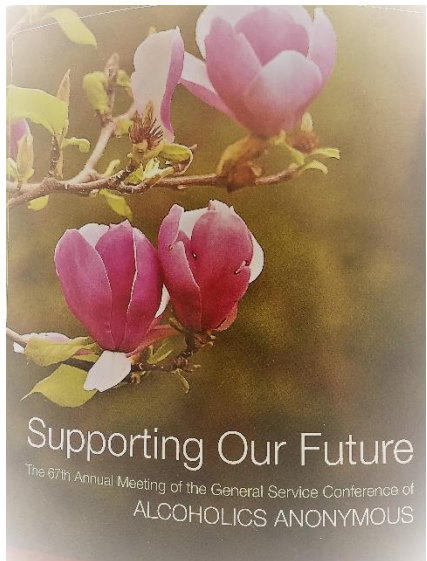
Is there a down side to AA groups continuing to be fractured into smaller more individualized groups?

There is something to be gained by exposing ourselves to views and approaches outside our comfort zone. Weigh this against the benefits of a safe, predictable atmosphere. I don't know if it's a "down" side but there is a financial cost to fewer members in more group spaces. In family life, when mom and dad split up, kids and assets get divided between two homes. If kids are old enough they have a choice where they live; if they're young, the parents or courts decide how much time they spend here and there. This might not be a broken home like many of us call it; it could be a healed home. In some cases, the environment(s) are better for all involved if mom and dad have grown incompatible. But when a family unit on a fixed income adds the cost of an extra home, that can lead to both mom and dad spending less time with kids (more work hours), it can thin out discretionary spending at best and cause financial chaos or collapse in a worst-case scenario. Two households increase cost of living and breakup rarely increases income to meet the new cost of living.

AA groups are the same way; if half of a 20-member group start their own group then there's less people at each meeting – less total financial contribution and (like the split-family) added costs. AA operates, by design on a corporate poverty model. Our service structure owns no, or very little, property, groups try to maintain their own prudent reserve but any excess seventh tradition accumulation above that prudent reserve, is sent to district, area, GSO or and/or our local central office to contribute our share to their expenses. Member and group participation is never predicated on ability to carry our weight. AA is never going to try to make a profit, but we do run on a razor-thin margin. GSO's overall operating budget is about \$16 million which is about \$8 per member. Collective wisdom is that it would be great if General Service was 100% funded by groups/members/Areas but contributions only fund about 1/2 of our General Service expense; the balance is subsidized by publishing sales. The publishing world is going through changes right now and the dependence on a consistent income from future book sales in a digital era as a model for long-term viability has its critics.

So at one end, GSO is wanting to be move towards being solely group/member funded (dependent) and at the same time members are starting more groups and taking on

more local expenses so we don't realistically have the prospect of extra money in the coffers to sent on to General Service.



The resentment is free; the coffee pot has to be paid for by group contributions, just like the room rent where the power-outlet is that we plug that coffee pot into.

Still, GSO's long-term financial peril isn't supposed to be the first consideration when thinking about breaking away from your current home group and starting one more to your liking. But it's worth thinking about periodically and that's part of what we like to muse over, once a year – our annual "AA by the numbers."

If you want to know more AA World Service income and expenses, ask your group GSR to get your group a copy of the latest *General Service Conference Final Report*. It's a confidential document with some AA members names, addresses and phone numbers in it so it isn't a publicly posted document. But it is every member's right to read it each year. The 2018 68th *General Service Conference Final Report* will be printed in French, English and Spanish and available soon. Most GSRs have a 2017 report in their group binder.

Thanks for following along.

ⁱ https://www.aa.org/newsletters/en_US/en_box459_summer_2018.pdf

ⁱⁱ <http://www.recoveryplaysofjackieb.org/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5SnH1Wwp9Qc>

^{iv} <https://www.secularaa.com>

^v <https://www.aahistorysymposium.org/>

^{vi} <https://eastbayaa.org/symposium-on-a-a-history-february-1-3-2019>

^{vii} <https://orlandorecoveryfamily.com/2015/06/03/how-it-worked-the-story-of-clarence-h-snyder/>

^{viii} <https://aaagnostica.org/2018/06/14/addiction-recovery-and-personal-character/>

^{ix} More on early AA with Ernie Kurtz and Bill White: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEab222byp0>

^x https://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/p-16_theaagroup.pdf

^{xi} https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utl2Xy1_vK4