

Hello, my name is Amber, and I'm an alcoholic. My date of sobriety is October 29th, 2009, and my home group is Start to Live in Oregon City, District 15. I am currently serving as delegate for Oregon area 58 panel 70. I'm honored to have been asked to present today. My topic is:

A Plain Language Version of the Big Book; Is the Book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, As Written in 1939, Easily Understood by All AA Members and Those to come?

My personal opinion is no; it is not easily understood by all, so probably not for all those to come either. However, I do believe we are doing the best that we know-how to carry the message to the newcomer. But how do we do better? Are we reaching the still suffering alcoholic the best we can? These are the questions I ask myself every time someone poses a question regarding the fears of change. Our Traditions help guide us to continue to serve by spiritual principles and make sure AA is here for those that have not entered the room yet. Each time we update the Big Book, new stories are added to reflect current lifestyles, which helps relatability. Still, it doesn't help someone with literacy issues, learning disabilities, or language barriers to understanding the language from 1939 in the most essential part of our book. Will this keep them from getting what we have? Are sponsors readily available to all that need one? Are we excluding the alcoholic who might never mentally mature past a fifth-grade level due to genetics? I wanted to start with the history of this topic.

From the very beginning, there has been a concern that some members might not understand the language conveyed in our book. In 1941 Dr. Bob was worried about the literacy levels of the blue collared worker and asked Evan W. (a former newspaper writer) to write a manual that would help with understanding. Evan wrote five documents called "The Akron Pamphlets." They were a series of guides to assist in lower reading levels for those that did not receive adequate (or any) schooling; This was the first mention that I could find of our book not being easily accessible to all.

Then on October 8th, 2015, a member from area 78 sent a letter to the trustee's literature committee requesting that they consider a plain language BB. From there, it was reviewed and discussed. They agreed to submit, and it became an agenda item for the 2016 Literature committee at the 66th conference. It did not make it out of committee that day, but the seed was planted.

Area 08 San Diego-Imperial never stopped talking about how much they needed help for their remote communities. There were several groups in need of such a book. So, on November 20th, 2016, a letter was sent from Beyond the Bars group, and again, in 2018, their delegate Roxane R. submitted another letter to the GSO Trustee Literature committee. Here is an excerpt from the January 2019 TLC Meeting Report "The committee reviewed and tabled the request for 'translating the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous into plain language – at a fifth grade or similar reading level.' The committee suggested that the General Service Board form a committee to gather information covering various perspectives related to accessibility and other pertinent issues to evaluate the request fully. The committee will continue discussions at the July 2019 meeting."

In 2020 on the agenda for the 70th conference, there it was again but inscribed in a way that was meant to allow for some flexibility. It was written as "Consider if proposed agenda items for plain language, simplified language, accessible translations and large print versions of the book Alcoholics Anonymous, as well as workbooks to help study the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, can be addressed with a common solution."

Then Covid hit, and many items were deferred to 2021 (this being one of them). It is hard to say whether this agenda item would have seen the conference floor last year for the conference to be discussed as a whole. That is for a power greater than myself to know. What I do know is how hard everyone new had to work to get sober last year. I was humbled each time a newcomer announced themselves on the screen. And even more in awe at the ones fighting so hard to stay here and grasp what we took for granted. I am just one of many noticing the struggles of last year's reality. And those that are doing twelve step-work but not helping with service committees might never have grasped the urgency of need from members they will never meet until we all became our own remote communities.

I am humbled by how the mysteries of the universe aligned. I stepped into the role of delegate as an alternate to finish the remainder of 2021. Being able to attend the virtual 71st conference is an experience that will be in my heart forever. The hard work and love the 132 conference members put in during the conference for Alcoholics Anonymous cannot be expressed in words, but it could be in our actions. The Plain and Simple translation of the Big Book made it to

the conference floor that week. There was a loving and passionate discussion heard on the pros and cons, and ultimately, the 5th tradition (our primary purpose is to carry the message to the alcoholic that still suffers) was in the foremost of our hearts. It passed, and we all took an emotional break to let such a monumental moment sink in. Hope won fear that day. Every time I hear Bill's talk on communication and how we must continue to evolve forward to reach the still suffering alcoholic, it fills my soul.

Two weeks ago, I set out to gather more information on the accessibility of our beloved book and attended my first meeting behind the walls via Skype. It was a men's meeting called 'Home Away from Home.' I had a lot of fear and preconceived notions of what this meeting might be like. I asked them if it was okay to have a few minutes of their meeting to ask them their thoughts on a plain and simple translation and whether it will help those yet to come. To hear their shares of gratitude and visibly expressed excitement was humbling. It was hard for me to hold back tears (while they were so brave). What made them the happiest is that their voices were heard, mattered, and there would be help coming through the new book. They asked if they could take back the question to the guys, not at the meeting, and post it on their bulletin boards. Then asked me to come back to their next meeting. Which, of course, I did! I joined them again at their next meeting, and there were several AA newcomers in the room. Each member that came up to speak communicated how this translation would mean to the members on the inside. And help them grasp our program with a deeper, clearer understanding.

Last week I presented the conference agenda outcomes to Oregon Area's linguistic districts. Finally, my first presentation in person! When I started writing my presentation on this subject, I realized that during my talk, I found myself rewording specific phrases for my translator. This made it easier for her to help them to understand; but did not change the meaning or outcomes of what happened; it just helped them learn. When I arrived at the topic of the translation, I was surprised at the enthusiasm that the plain and simple Big Book brought. There were quite a few who were bilingual, and they said it would be helpful to have a version that they could use to teach others. What they shared made sense. After the meeting, we all sat down for dinner together, another emotional moment for me—we discussed what these changes mean for those to come.

English literacy is not just an issue facing remote communities. Many of our own children and grandchildren are not as proficient in English as Bill and Bob were in their generation. Social media, texting, online videos, and even regular television erode good language and replace it with slang and texting shorthand. We owe it to AA's future to ensure that we are doing everything we can to make AA available to anyone, anywhere. A plain and simple translation to aid in education compares to translations in any other language, one of their understanding. It doesn't alter or replace our book; it makes the language of the heart accessible to those that need it.

I wanted to end with a passage from the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions; at the end of the twelfth step, Bill wrote: With each passing day of our lives, may every one of us sense more deeply the inner meaning of AA's simple prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things we cannot change,

Courage to change the things we can,

And wisdom to know the difference

Thank you for letting me be of service,

Amber N. , Delegate Area 58