

Hi. I want to thank the Committee of this year's Pacific Northwest Conference for inviting me to participate in today's presentations. My name is Justine, and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is Feb. 16, 1999. I currently serve as the Alternate District Committee Member, District 12-121, Area 03, Arizona. My service roots started in Area 92 where I once served as District 5's Alt. DCM under Gary P.'s wonderful leadership.

My topic is *The Book ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS. The first 164 pages and Fifth Edition.*

The 71<sup>st</sup> General Service Conference is behind us now. During that momentous week, our delegates, from across the United States and Canada, tackled many Agenda Items. Chief among them, in my opinion, was the consideration to prepare a draft version for a Fifth Edition of the Big Book.

Many of you have probably participated in your Delegate's Report back and know there will be a Fifth Edition, with no chapters rewritten or removed but with new stories added, as there has been since the second edition was published. Each edition of Alcoholics Anonymous has always had newer, current personal stories added to reflect our changing society. Additionally, their vote carried for a new plain language book, which will serve as a companion to the Big Book. These are significant literature changes for our Fellowship.

A 1995 Literature Committee Advisory Action states, "*The first 164 pages of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, the Preface, the Forewords, "The Doctor's Opinion," "Doctor Bob's Nightmare and the Appendices remain as is."* is a clear guide for our Delegates discussions. In fact, the 1996 Committee wanted to include the first 164 pages with the Traditions and Warranties, requiring a 75% written approval from all members globally. Furthermore, the Committee's 1980 Advisory Action says: "*As the preface to the Big Book clearly states that the text was written in 1939 and that it has not been changed, no further explanation regarding out-of-date phrases and/or gender-oriented pronouns or chapter titles is necessary.*"

I am grateful for the delegates spiritual discussions and deliberations in casting their votes. They are our active voice at the conference. I can not begin to imagine the total number **of** hours delegates have spent through the years discussing changes to the Big Book! By substantial unanimity, their votes maintained the first 164 pages as it was originally written.

Warranty Four from The A.A. Service Manual states on page 66, "This principle further guarantees that all matters of importance, time permitting, will be extensively debated, and that such debates will continue until a really heavy majority can support every critical decision that we are called upon to make in the Conference."

**DELETE Generally, debates start at the group level when a group wants to see something changed, the idea then goes to the district where it is discussed, and then to the area committee for more discussion. Every step of an idea for change undergoes extensive debate.**

Our members have been asking for a plain language book for quite some time. I hope you had the opportunity to watch The Big Book Presentation video on AA.org. It is meant to be a vehicle to stimulate a broader discussion regarding not just our Big Book, but also why should we consider a plain language Big Book. **A plain language book is needed because statistics prove the level of illiteracy is extremely high in America.** How many of you have read a sentence in a novel two or three times because it just did not make sense? Now imagine reading all the passages in Alcoholics Anonymous and not understanding any of it. You will be hearing more about plain language from our next panelist.

The Big Book is our basic text, as it is stated in the Preface. Think of the textbooks you used in high school or college. We read them, we reread them, we *studied* the text. Therefore, our textbook, Alcoholics Anonymous, should be read and reread regularly, studied and discussed with other AAers. Each time we read our book we find the "word gremlins" have added something new. Why is that? If we read the Big Book with our sponsors or in Big Book discussion meetings, we need not worry about the idioms or vintage terminology when others can translate them for us.

So why is our basic text, which millions of people globally have used to attain sobriety, an Agenda Item seeking changes to the first 164 pages? Why are there requests to rewrite the first three (3) chapters? Why just those three (3) and the requests to remove Chapters 8, 9, and 10; "To Wives," "The Family Afterward," and "To Employers," respectively? Why

did our first 40 members of the Fellowship feel the importance of sequencing the Chapters as they are presented? Do not our earliest members have historical value in sharing exactly what they did?

From *The Language of the Heart*, Bill's article for the Grapevine in January 1946 Page 13:

*As the book took form we inscribed in it the essence of our experience. It was the product of thousands of hours of discussion. It truly represented the collective voice, heart and conscience of those of us who had pioneered the first four years of AA.*

And November 1951 Page 133

*Well, we did quarrel violently over the preparation and distribution of that AA Book. In fact, it took five years for the clamor to die down. Should any AA's dream that the old-timers who put the Book together went about at the time in serene meditation and white robes, then they had best forget it. The inspiration that readers now say they find in the volume must have got there by the grace of God only!*

There are far too many instances that can be quoted in the Big Book that demonstrate the specificity of the old-timers' quest to write the exact path they walked to get sober. They also noted numerous times that the words are hammered out from their experiences during their trial-and-error period of the early years. So much love and hope for we unborn alcoholics. And the conviction in their experiences! Have you ever noticed how many passages are italicized or how many "musts" there are?

Let us now look to the future. We are responsible that the Fellowship is here for future generations of alcoholics. Before I complete my time, I would like to ask some questions for future conversations. What specific changes are sought? Is there anything else the Fellowship can do in identifying the needs that are the motivation behind the changes? How inclusive are we as individuals and in our respective groups? Are we demonstrating love and tolerance to all? Or are we passing judgement based on appearance, language skills, reading skills? Are we mindful of acceptance, inclusiveness, cultural differences, lifestyle differences? Are we the hand of AA? Or do we have "dinosaur arms?" Is this unique to America? And if so, why? With a revised 5<sup>th</sup> edition coming, along with the new companion book, will this suffice? If not, what more needs to be done? Are we continually seeking ways to be more inclusive in all our literature and actions? Could the answers to these questions enlighten us to comprehend the search for changes to our Big Book and change our attitudes and behaviors?

In conclusion, I would like to close with a few final quotes from *The Language of the Heart*,

INTRODUCTION Page xiv:

*" . . . Bill was a man of his times, and some readers may find unfamiliar idioms and terminology, or may be taken aback by the phraseology that would be considered inappropriate today. Once again, language (with a few changes that necessitated no rewriting) has been retained, because any tampering with phraseology might also have tampered with the meaning.*

November 1950 Pages 124 and 125

*. . . AA is not ours to do with as we please. We are but caretakers to preserve the spiritual quality of our Fellowship; keep it whole for those who will come after us and have need of what has so generously been given to us.*

*For twelve years, warmly aided by great friends, Dr. Bob and I have stood sentinel over your Headquarters. We have been holding these valuable assets in trust for you – your General Service Office, your book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, your principal magazine the AA Grapevine, your public relations, your common funds. . . . We ask that you guard them well, for the future of Alcoholics Anonymous may much depend on how you maintain and support these life-giving arms of service.*

Thank you.