

DELEGATE'S POST-CONFERENCE REPORT

57TH GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE

APRIL 22-28, 2007

CROWNE PLAZA TIMES SQUARE, MANHATTAN, NEW YORK

**“OUR 12TH STEP RESPONSIBILITY – ARE WE
GOING TO ANY LENGTH?”**

JIMMY SELL

PANEL 56 DELEGATE

AREA 45, SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE ON TREATMENT FACILITIES

In many respects the 57th General Service Conference began for me back in late January. I was in New York City for the first quarter meeting of the General Service Board. It was 9 degrees out and wind-chills made it feel like 13 below zero. This would be a five day extended weekend event. I was joined by all of my fellow Panel 56 Delegates who had been fortunate enough to have been elected chair of their respective Conference Committees. It was great to bond with these dozen characters as we

*attended meetings of the Conference Trustees Committees as invited guests. We sat in on board meetings and I was even (completely by surprise) handed the gavel and asked to chair the Trustees Committee on Treatment Facilities by soon to be rotating trustee, Allen Ault (non-alcoholic). Attending this event gave all of us an insight into the agenda items that would be facing us at the General Service Conference that the other delegates would not have. It was at once educational and humbling to observe our trustees, Class A and B, lovingly handle the affairs of our beloved fellowship. We delegates all agreed that our one regret was that we could not participate in their discussions. We were seated along the walls and were basically observers, offering no input. We all opined that we would have loved to put in our two cents at times. In fact, we were chomping at the bit in many cases! With the experience of the Board Weekend under our belt, we now fast-forward to **late April**....*

On the final day of the 2007 General Service Conference, out-going Southwest Regional Trustee, Gary K., made the following observation: “Everything we’ve accomplished here in the past week doesn’t amount to a hill of beans if we don’t take it back home and share it with our Areas.” I am going to attempt to convey to everyone what the spiritual experience of the General Service Conference was like and what transpired during that week-long event. There is no way that I will be able to convey all of what went on in the limited amount of time that I have, but I’ll try to hit the highlights. I will begin by attempting to recount on a day-to-day basis, the conference experience.

*I was transported to the Crowne Plaza Hotel on Broadway in New York City on **Friday**, April 20th, two days before the official start of the conference, by your Alternate Delegate, Julie W. and her husband, Rich. This allowed me to get settled in and I immediately started seeing faces I recognized from the previous years’ Conference. I recalled that this day and the **Saturday** following were going to be the “calm before the storm,” so to speak. Once the Conference gets underway, it is a non-stop whirlwind of activity from early morning until late at night. By Saturday evening, all of the delegates arrived and we had our first “delegates-only” meeting. This meeting allows the 93 delegates from the U.S. and Canada to become acquainted with each other and help make the first-year delegates comfortable in their new surroundings. Some of the Panel 56 Delegates were called upon at random by or Delegate Chair, Darryl M., (Area 26, Kentucky) to share briefly some experiences from the 2006 Conference. I was one of those chosen and we mostly tried to address our sharing to the first-year delegates regarding what they were about to experience. One gem came from the aforementioned Darryl M., who stated: “I owe A.A. a debt that I can’t even pay the interest on.”*

Sunday began with the Remote Communities workshop. Though this event is not part of the conference, it has become a traditional way of learning about those regions in the U.S. and Canada that are remote due to geography, language or culture.

Many of our Canadian delegates travel for days by plane, boat and automobile to present their post-conference reports. One Area in Canada has a \$90,000 budget for delegate travel alone. This is the sort of mind-boggling information that is shared at the Remote Communities meeting.

Sunday afternoon is when the Conference officially begins. Roll call began at 1:15 p.m. sharp and was conducted by GSO general manager, Greg M. It is an awe-inspiring session as each conference members name is called and we one-by-one stand and respond: "Here." One truly gets the sense that we are all gathered as a body to do the work of Alcoholics Anonymous. The 57th Annual General Service Conference was officially underway.

Later that same day, each of the Conference Committees, which are comprised of 8 or 9 Delegates, met jointly with the trustees of their respective committees. I am always amazed at the depth of knowledge and experience that our trustees bring to these sessions. During this time we are apprised of progress made on considerations made during the prior years' conference and are brought up to speed on projects in the works affecting our committee. Sunday evening during Conference week features the opening banquet. This year we heard a moving tribute to the late Nell Wing (non-alcoholic), Bill W.'s former secretary and A.A.'s first archivist. We also heard from five speakers (10 minutes each) from various parts of the U.S. and Canada. For my second General Service Conference banquet, I invited our Alternate Delegate, Julie W., as my guest. Julie already knows many of the conference members and several of the guests greeted her enthusiastically.

Monday morning bright and early found the delegates in our first Conference Committee meetings. This is the nuts and bolts of the conference where we discuss and debate the agenda items pertinent to our particular conference committee. This year I was privileged to serve as chairman of the Conference Treatment Facilities Committee; having been elected to do so by last years' committee. It is humbling to watch the process work. I can't speak for any other committee but the one on which I served. I can tell you that several members of the TF Committee expressed strong opinions at the Sunday meeting with the Trustees and by the time our work in the committee (minus the trustees) was completed everyone's opinion had evolved and we had arrived at conclusions diametrically opposite the opinions we held on Sunday. Amazing!

The entire conference re-convened in the afternoon to hear reports and presentations from several AAWS and Grapevine staff members and to hear Delegate Area highlights.

Our evening wrapped up with another very moving presentation by our G.S.O Archivist, Amy Filiatreau (non-alcoholic). Amy hit a home run with the conference and

I have included her presentation in your kit to read at your leisure. Like last year, there wasn't a dry eye in the house when she was through.

***Tuesday** was the delegate's second and final day of committee deliberations. During this meeting, we finalized our recommendation and additional committee considerations and wrapped up the loose ends. As a final item of business, we elected next years' chair and alternate chair for the committee.*

Tuesday is also the day we hold our Regional Luncheon. All of the delegates meet to discuss Regional matters with their trustee over lunch. As usual the NERDS have to do everything over the top! We had a group "anonymity protected" photo taken.....and a photo with masks off.

Then it was off on our annual field trip to the General Service Office. This portion of the conference is always a hoot as we board the "1 Train" and head uptown. Those delegates from distant rural locales who were in their second year of service acted as "subway sponsors" to the first year delegates who have never been to New York before, let alone rode one of its storied subways. By now, the returning delegates are all seasoned veterans and I found myself following a few of them as we disembarked at 116th St. The staff at GSO welcomed us warmly and really mad us feel as if we had arrived "home." We toured the archives and mail room; posed for pictures and kept the employees jumping with purchasing orders and questions. On the way home, a few of us took a slight detour to this sight which may be familiar to many of you from a popular television series. The evening was spent in a Delegates-only meeting. At this meeting we selected our Delegate Chairperson for next years General Service Conference. This is done strictly at random, out-of-the-hat. We found that God does indeed have a sense of humor, as the individual selected is a woman from French-speaking Quebec, France' J. Her knowledge of English is very limited and she speaks through an interpreter most of the time. France' has vowed to use the coming year to improve her English-speaking capabilities in time for the 2008 Conference. J

***Wednesday** was by far my busiest day of the Conference. We started out early by attending the Conference workshop. We are divided into 10 groups of 12 or 13 conference members. I had been selected by the Conference Coordinator, Rick W., to moderate one of the workshop groups. This was indeed an honor and was one more wonderful aspect of my overall conference experience. The workshop topic this year was "Spiritual Value of our A.A. Dollars."*

Early afternoon was set aside for Regional Elections. The Northeast Region was first up. Let me explain how this all works. The 18 delegates from the Northeast Region are all seated in an area of the room which is roped off. We are joined by 18 other conference members. Some are delegates from the Conference Trustees Committee and

some are Trustees from around the country. These 36 are the voting body for the election. Everyone else remains outside the roped area as observers. Each delegate then gives a two minute presentation on their nominee and answers questions (if any) about the candidate. I would like to take this opportunity to thank a few people for their valuable input on the presentation. I was determined that this election was not going to go “to the hat” like it did 8 years ago. I told our nominee, John K., that I would do everything I could and would bring all of my resources to bear to put together the best presentation possible. I wanted the presentation to be rock-solid. I consulted Robbie W., who wrote a presentation when he was delegate. His input was vital. I then drew up a draft copy and ran it by our Alternate Delegate, Julie W., and then re-wrote it using some excellent suggestions she made. Finally, I asked our Panel 54 Past Delegate, Laurie E., to review the document. She also contributed a suggestion. So you see, this was really a committee effort! I am blessed to have such talented and caring friends to turn to. Now, back to the election. Understand that the nominees themselves are not present at the Conference; however resumes of each candidate are provided for all voting members. There were a total of fourteen nominees for the position of Northeast Regional Trustee because four Areas of our region did not put forward a nominee. After all presentations are concluded the balloting begins. Voting is by secret ballot and Third Legacy Procedure is observed. After the second ballot is completed any nominee with less than 20% of the vote is dropped from the board. By the time we got to the end of the second ballot, there were only two candidates with more than 20 % of the vote. A third ballot was conducted and I am pleased to report that Area 45, Southern New Jersey’s nominee for Northeast Regional Trustee, John K., secured more than 2/3 of the votes after the votes were tallied. Congratulations, John! This marks the first time in the 57 year history of the General Service Conference that a Northeast Regional Trustee has been elected from Area 45, Southern New Jersey.

That same evening after dinner, the report-backs from the various Conference Committee meetings were to begin. As the Delegate Chair of the Conference Treatment Facilities Committee, it would be my responsibility to present our committee work from the podium when it was our turn. Shortly after dinner, Greg M., GSO manager, button-holed me and informed me that Treatment Facilities were slated to be the first committee to report. Once the other members of TF heard the news, they promptly took seats in the front row, so that in the event of the need for a quick caucus during debate, they were all seated together. At this time I would like to express my thanks to a wonderful committee. I could not have asked for a more diligent and thoughtful group to work with. All members came to the conference well prepared and we jumped into our work right away. The results of our work were now to be heard by the full conference. We had one recommendation and once Greg M. opened the floor for questions and debate only a few people approached the floor microphones. When the vote took place, the entire conference was unanimous in their support of the agenda item. There followed a

few more questions regarding the Additional Committee Considerations and we were through. They say it's a sign of good committee work when a presentation goes as smoothly as this one did and I credit the members of the Conference TF Committee for their diligence in making this happen.

Wow! It was still Wednesday and I had started hours earlier moderating a workshop. Then it was on to Trustee elections and now first up for report backs. The day was still far from over.

We worked on into the evening from here, as other conference committees gave their reports and discussion went on into the night. We adjourned at around 10:30 p.m. I was beat, BUT.....there is a long-standing tradition at the General Service Conference among the Northeast Regional Delegates. Wednesday night is NERDS Night Out! NERDS (Northeast Regional Delegates) Night Out is an opportunity to blow off some steam. So far, the Conference has been a good deal of hard work and long hours. We all leave the hotel and go out somewhere for ice cream, courtesy of the Northeast Regional Trustee. In the past, Ellen's Stardust Diner, two blocks down Broadway, has been our hot spot. But this year we tried something different. In the past few months a new place opened directly across the street from our hotel called The Spotlight. This place features karaoke with a twist. You are on a stage with professional, Broadway-type back-up singers and dancers. Every table in the place is equipped with a touch-screen from which you select the song your group wants to perform. Then you go onstage and let it rip along with the pros as back up. The really unique part is that it's all being broadcast onto a Jumbo-tron screen out front over the façade of the building for all of Broadway to see, LIVE!, as you're doing it. Our gang elected to karaoke to "Heard it Through the Grapevine" (get it?). From the touch-screens other patrons can cast votes on your performance. "Grapevine" won the number one performance of the evening from the assembled masses. All of this to say, we truly are not a glum lot. I left after an hour and a half and headed back across the street to the hotel. As I crossed Broadway and approached the main entrance to our "home" I was surprised to see several conference members out front looking across at The Spotlight and watching the big screen. Everybody's a critic. I'll not share their running commentary here.

Thursday will best be remembered for the continuing report-backs and discussions. We were well into the Conference Trustees Committee report-back by this time. The Trustees committee had by far the most contentious and controversial issues to deal with than any other committee. Debate dragged on and on over the "Class B" issue and the issue of rotation on the part the office manager. We took a break and I stood up and turned to the delegate behind me and said: "Jamie, this conference is officially bogged down." As indeed we seemed to be. At 10:00 p.m. we were asked by the chairman if we wanted to continue on or call it a night, get some rest and start up again in the morning. By a near unanimous vote we elected to call it a night. It was late Thursday night and

we still had five committee report-backs to hear, debate and vote on. Not a good omen.

***Friday** morning we heard reports on the A.A. Grapevine and La Vina, our meetings in print. This was a welcome respite from the night before and I'm happy to report that we continue to be well served by our Grapevine staff. Following this was a sharing session, where delegates could ask questions or share experiences.*

We then dug back into the task of hearing the remaining report-backs and debating and voting on the items before the Conference. By some miracle, things really started to hum. The work flowed smoothly from here on in, even though there was still plenty of debating going on. We finished all of the committee report-backs just about on time. It is a blur as I think back on that Friday of the Conference. Typically, Friday evenings are "free time." It is generally expected that the Conference would finish up its business by 5 p.m. Many conference members make advance plans for Friday evening, so we were relieved to have finished on time.

At his point, Chairman of the Board, Leonard Blumenthal, called three people to the dais. We then heard the Serenity prayer recited in English, French and Spanish, with the conference joining in for the English version. The 57th general Service Conference was formally adjourned.

Words cannot express the gratitude I have for having been privileged to serve as Area 45 Delegate to the General Service Conference. I truly wish all of you could have been "flies on the wall." It is a spiritual experience without equal. I sincerely believe that our co-founders were God-inspired to have devised such a method of continuity; to provide for an informed group conscience and a means of executing it, after their departure.

At this point Leonard called upon all of the Panel 56 Delegates to approach a floor microphone for final words. (2 minutes max!) This is always a very moving and touching part of the conference as my fellow delegates bid farewell. I recall turning to a delegate sitting next to me and saying, "I hate this part." That's not true, really. I just hate the fact that our week together is drawing to a close and we will soon go our separate ways. I was filled with emotion as some of my good friends tearfully shared on their week-long experience.

Up to this point, on a personal level, I had had a wonderful conference. There were so many rewarding and wonderful things that happened. But God was not finished yet. It is a tradition of the General Service Conference that at the end of business on Friday and after the delegates who are rotating on have had an opportunity to say a few words, a drawing is held. The names of all of the second-year delegates are placed in a hat and one name is drawn. The individual whose name is drawn receives the Conference theme banner to take home with them as a souvenir of the Conference. I was the most astounded person in the room when Conference Coordinator, Rick W., announced my

name as the banner winner. As if my conference had not already been exciting enough to this point! After it makes the rounds to the Northeast regional Forum, and perhaps NERAASA 2008, I will donate it to our area archives.

At the end of the session, the Northeast Regional Delegates retreated to a nearby Brazilian Steak House where we held a surprise farewell party for our out-going Regional Trustee, Mike P. Boy, was he surprised!

On Saturday, the five trustees who are rotating on gave their farewell comments at a breakfast. We heard from Mike P., Arnold R., Allen Ault (Class A), Gary K., and Murray McI. We then were on our way.

If someone had asked me to write my own script for this conference (your Area Panel knows how I love to write scripts) I would have cheated myself. I was blessed in so many ways. I was privileged to be elected chair of the Conference Committee on which I served. Part of that enormous responsibility is to present our committees work at the dais to the entire conference. The chair is then expected to field the myriad questions from the floor that arise. What an experience! I was also chosen to moderate one of the workshop sections. (There are a total of 10). It so happened that this year was a Regional Trustee election year. I had the privilege of writing and presenting a presentation for our area candidate AND watching as that candidate was elected on the third ballot. Then, to take home the conference banner....the icing on the cake! It is extremely rare for all of these things to occur in the same year to the same delegate. I had an experience that I know I will remember for the rest of my life. I want to thank all of Area 45 for your continued support of our Area and our General Service Office. Without you, none of it would be possible. Thank you for allowing me to serve our wonderful fellowship.