



## Rebellion Dogs Blog Summer 2021

*The era of Millennials (Generation Y)  
stewardship of our peer2peer community*

This is the blog/print version of Episode #58 of Rebellion Dogs Radio. It's Hot Summer from our COVID City, 2021. Annually, we do a year-over-year review. Let's look at AA's second all-Zoom General Service Conference (USA/Canada), AA World Services, AA Grapevine, gather with 90+ delegates from USA and Canada. Also, the most recent – the 26<sup>th</sup> – World General Service Conference, we learn about AA outside the USA and Canada region. There is 2020 US Census Data coming out piecemeal. Other surveys through the year get put in the Rebellion Dogs reporting blender, too.

Here is the thing: Millennials, quietly started turning 40-years-old last year – say what? The youngest Millennial is 25 this year; I know, we are all getting older. They are the largest adult population in America now. Move over Baby Boomer AA's; there's a new sheriff in town, Generation Y will take it from here. This Zoom meeting – zoom conference thing isn't freaking them out. It's greener, more time efficient, encourages teamwork, costs less, they can order shoes and clothing for home deliver during the meeting ... This is right up their alley.

Maybe that's why the language of AA – once unchangeable because of it's hallowed, nostalgic pedigree is being brought up to Century 21 speed. Even some Bill W-isms are – as I suspect Uncle Bill would encourage – being modernized. Thought AA would never change? Whether that made you glad or sad, we were wrong about that. This isn't the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a new generation has taken the helm.

Millennials, I see you. If you're listening –and I know you are – yes, I'm a 1960 Baby Boomer; we had our chance. It is not AA's founders to blame for a reified basic text; The last time a new publication of new material was published by AA World Services, was 1975 – two generations ago – so the blame for a stuck AA is Baby Boomers, we did that. Yes, I know, some don't think any AA language or rituals should change but that view is in the minority now. Baby Boomers are included in Bill W's caution about... those who fear needed change:

“Let us never fear needed change. Certainly, we have to discriminate between change for the worse and change for the better. But once a need becomes clearly apparent in an individual, in a group, or in AA as a whole, it has long since been found out that we cannot stand still and look the other way. The essence of all

growth is a willingness to change for the better and then an unremitting willingness to shoulder whatever responsibility this entails.” Bill Wilson, AA Grapevine July 1965 and *As Bill Sees It*.<sup>i</sup>

In 1965, Bill W knew he would not be around to lead AA forever. So what I’m saying is we Boomers had our fair chance. We proved to no match for our own resistance to change. Millennials, you have the helm; I am at your service and in your debt.

In part, the COVID pandemic effect may have sped up the process of AA getting unstuck in the quagmire of reification. Everyone, everywhere is changing how we live, love and recover; demographic data from the 2020 US Census shows that 21<sup>st</sup> century America was already trending in a new direction. A swath of beliefs exist across the country, where the Christian primacy of a nation and 12-Step room previously dominated. Millennial stewardship of our meetings and fellowships shows a more modern, sensitive and tolerant tone. This is year two of their decade; Next decade; that is all Millennials, also. The 20’s of this century will roar with non-violent communication.

We cover AA a lot—I know—because AA is the grandparent of peer-to-peer in some regards. Yes, every peer group is autonomous; plenty of SMART Recovery or Women for Sobriety members have never been to a 12-step meeting and recovery looks sunny without a one-through-twelve checklist. And of course even with the 12-step world there are so many unique iterations that there are substantial numbers of members of substance or behavioral-based addictions that don’t care about changes to the AA *Big Book* or *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* because they don’t read or rely on them for continued recovery. Of course, that’s true even within AA. Some AA meetings don’t read conference-approved literature in their AA meetings and pay little attention to AA worldwide. Their concern is for themselves, each other and newcomers who login or enter the meeting room.

Recently, in an AAagnostica article by Dr. Ray B about navigating being a public voice of people in recovery and respecting the AA anonymity tradition, John L made a point about identifying ourselves as “12-Step members in a 12-Step fellowship.” John’s 53 years sober from alcohol and other mind-altering drugs and he’s not a proponent of the Twelve Steps themselves. His 2014 book, [\*A Freethinker in AA\*](#)<sup>ii</sup>, describes his AA program as one-day at a time, staying away from the first drink, fellowship, honesty, service, etc., but nothing about being defective, powerless or being morally corrupt... nothing 12-step-ish at all. So, John makes a point that we misrepresent the broad paths within AA and other like-minded fellowships because not everyone owes their recovery to or has ever practiced the Twelve Steps... certainly not as a one-through-twelve structured process. What’s a better way to describe us? That’s worth thinking about.

A trend continues in our 21-years-old millennium that AA is doing great in America. We are shrinking in membership, everywhere else. We will hear concern about AA's relatability and continued relevance in the reporting, today.

The 2020 USA census is starting to be digested now. America is now "the old country" – the way we once called Europe. With twenty years of a trending older population and fewer coming the USA in search of any American dream, youth population wanes and the USA is looking more like a retirement community than the new world. Is it true that as goes America, so goes AA? And is AA's fate contagious when it comes to other process/substance use fellowships that follow the same guiding principles? The point here, is change is constant and AA is changing; it always has been. If you take exception to this assertion, stay with me. You can call BS at the end if you're still not convinced.

### **This just in... The 71<sup>st</sup> General Service Conference, 2021**

Alcoholics Anonymous takes its own inventory every year and takes steps to "make amends" and "admit when we were wrong." And... nobody is happy. As always, the changes are underwhelming for progressives and way too risky for the most conservative members. The USA/Canada General Service Conference overcame a huge sacred cow, which is a beginning. Starting with the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, the reified words of Bill W are being modernized. For some, the never-changers, this marks a breakdown in orthodoxy, a beginning of the end. For others, this bridge-building, gateway-widening adaptation to modern times is not enough; it's painfully slow.

The 2021 Conference found a way to overcome the roadblock with is the sacredness of the 1939 *Alcoholics Anonymous*. It's a compromise, giving two impassioned sides what they claim to need – for the newcomer, of course. On one hand, plans for a 5<sup>th</sup> Edition *Big Book* are in action (First Edition 1939, Second Edition 1955, Third Edition 1976, Fourth Edition 2001); no changes will be made to the first 164 pages. And, another project will create a plain-language "translation" of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. The key word in the General Service Conference advisory action is not calling this "re-writing" the *Big Book*. They call it "translating" the 1939 narrative into 21<sup>st</sup> century vernacular. After all, the book is now in 70+ foreign languages; now it is being translated into 21<sup>st</sup> century American. More on changes coming our way and the timeline, later in this report.

AA isn't all about America. I've just read the report from the 26<sup>th</sup> World Service Meeting (2020) which, represents groups and members from countries outside of USA/Canada. And have you read the new survey results of demographics coming out of the USA about diversifying worldviews and a transforming culture? Perhaps AA's USA homeland can take some cues from all the countries it's exporting sobriety to.



The World Service Meeting met virtually in 2020, represented 109 countries. Under the “I” for example, Iceland, India, Iran and Ireland are represented. Our World Service Meeting happens later in the year, needs more translation, hence, the 2020 Final Report just came out in 2021.

The most popular topics at the World Service Meeting included:

- Safety in AA
- Encouraging Women in General Service
- Young people in AA
- Anonymity and the age of online AA

Jan K, of the Czech Republic, spoke on “What Are We Doing To Attract Young People?” The following excerpt is from the *26<sup>th</sup> World Service Meeting 2020 A Virtual Event*.<sup>iii</sup> Acronym Trigger-Alert ... AA, notorious for throwing around acronyms which speed up conversation, and also create an “in-crowd” and “out-crowd” divide for those who know what CPC, H&I or AAWS means, and those who don’t. In our “always inclusive, never exclusive” principled fellowship we still struggle with those who don’t know AA-speak feeling left out. Jan K is talking to seasoned AA’s so if you are unfamiliar with some of the acronyms, there will be a lot of YPAAs (pronounced Why Paw) which stands for Young People in AA. There is an ICYPAA, International Conference of Young People in AA, just like IDAA, International Doctors in AA or ICSAA, International Conference of Secular AA. So, besides the ICYPAA there are many regional YPAA organizations, each with cute sounding acronyms.

My favorite right now is MONQYPAA, Young People from Montreal Quebec. Before, it was WACYPAA, Western Area which stretches from Yukon and Alaska to Mexico. Back to Jan’s report: “For those who are only 20 now, it might be difficult to identify with the idea that they should be in touch with A.A. for the rest of their lives. A lot of young people can leave A.A., that is the fact. It depends on how the A.A. program helps them, how the foundations are laid and whether or not the Traditions are followed in groups. It is important not to discourage them with our fanaticism, by putting across our ‘guaranteed truths,’ but to listen to them and take them seriously. To show them an example of behavior that is appealing but sincere; to be equal, not to be arrogant; to have fun – to show them that we absolutely insist on enjoying life.

Many young people can be discouraged by words like *God* or *Higher Power*, the same as adults. It is particularly important to emphasize to them that this Fellowship is for everyone, atheists, and agnostics as well. In this case, I would appreciate having the pamphlet "The 'God Word' [agnostics and atheists in AA]" translated, as it is full of stories of people who are sober and happy in A.A. without any religious or spiritual concept of higher power. So, do not push and let everyone have their own way. ...



Also, numbers of Czech young A.A.s traveling across Europe are increasing year to year. They participate in conventions such as EURYPAA or SCANCYPAA<sup>iv</sup>, which shows a positive trend. Young people in Czech A.A. organized EURYPAA in Prague in 2014, which was my first YPAA convention and I was amazed how young people have fun without alcohol. I also had the opportunity to network with other young members from different countries, which at the time made me feel like Alice in Wonderland. Until then I had been isolated and suddenly, I had dozens of new friends around me. This experience had a big impact on my perception of A.A. and staying in it. Many activities related to reaching out to young people are still just beginning in our country. We think we are on the right track. It is improving, although now at the time of the COVID-19 crisis most of these activities are on hold. Schools are closed and contact is limited. We are not allowed to go to prisons, treatment centers, etc. The main way to reach young people is the Internet and treatment centers, which can still direct young people to A.A., even if it's just online meetings. Each form of contact with other recovering alcoholics is vital these days and I am grateful to have this possibility of having virtual rooms where we can meet not only locally but also globally like we are meeting right now."

There's lots we can unpack in how AA can alter or improve meeting Jan's concerns about meeting anyone where they are at. What's more effective? Accommodating those who we share a kinship of common suffering; or demanding that everyone conform to



our personal or AA's collective views? Even, in this pandemic, "Newcomers are approaching AA ...They represent almost every belief and attitude imaginable."<sup>v</sup>

Jan reminds us, with new people "listen to them and take them seriously." Answering every objection with "Yeah but..." isn't listening. At least, it's not very good listening. There is:

1. listening until it's my turn to talk,
2. empathic, engaged listening, and if we're really good,
3. listening for what's not being said.

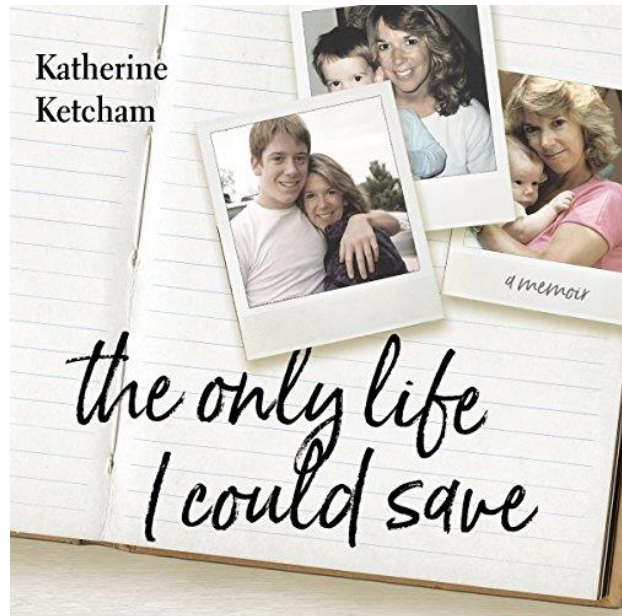
If a 22-year-old says, "Oh, I don't think I need to quit completely," do we launch in with, "Denial isn't a river in Egypt, you know!" Or share our own experience with negotiating and ambivalence when we were new; or ask, "So why did you make a decision to log on to this meeting, and what is your plan?" Sometimes they will tell us what is not being said if we bring a "beginners mind" and probe further or feedback what they told us. Few are 100% sure they can't drink ever again, or 100% sure your peer-to-peer group is a right fit at their first meeting. Jan reminds us that it's more important that youth feel that they are heard, they are welcome and they are free to be with us as long as they need or want our company.

What if they express some apprehension about the whole higher power thing? A "reaction" would be either the "But AA's spiritual not religious," oversimplification or go on a rant about our own misgivings with AA language and theology. Wouldn't it be better, first, to ask them exactly what their concern is, and have them elaborate?

Jan says something that would apply to youth in any country: make sure they hear/read "stories of people who are sober and happy in A.A. without any religious or spiritual concept of higher power." For newcomers, as Bill W described them, "with every belief and attitude imaginable," how much less effective will we be suggesting that reliance on the-mercy-of-gods belief and attitude has primacy in AA, while a humanist belief and attitude will be simply "tolerated"? Don't we all need to hear stories whereby we relate to the people telling the story? I hear the passion and urgency in Jan's talk. How many of Jan's fellow members take a fatal turn in their own addiction and recovery?

I am revisiting the stunning collection of work on addiction/recovery from Katherine Ketcham. Her contributions have brought truth and science where superstition and gut feeling had to suffice, before. Ketcham's gateway-offering was the 1981 *Under the Influence: A Guide to the Myths and Realities of Alcoholism* with Dr. James R. Milam. Almost 20 years later *Beyond the Influence: Understanding and Defeating Alcoholism* Ketcham wrote with a team of co-authors. She participated in two with Ernie Kurtz, *The Spirituality of Imperfection* and it's 20-year follow up, *Experiencing Spirituality* (2015). I

count 16 books about how to help us help each other, how to save the still-suffering addict/alcoholic, before a more personal book came out, *The Only Life I Could Save*, her story about living through the addiction/recovery of one of three children, Ben. I am quite moved by (finally) hearing Katherine Ketcham's personal accounts. I am sure I'll have more to say when I'm done the book. I thought of Ketcham because through forty years now, she have been part of "more will be revealed" from academia and science. Our ongoing individual and collective anecdotal experience also continues to reveal a greater body of experience than our original literature had access to. We were dozens of members in 1939. Now we are millions. That's an aside, the real reason Katherine Ketcham came to mind is that every family is impacted by addiction including the youth in our extended families. Ketcham's wealth of scientific and storytelling know-how wasn't an inoculation against personal suffering and risk. Jan's talk made me think of Ben and his mom, Katherine Ketcham.



AA's who subscribe to a supernatural explanation of AA sobriety don't need to cower nor apologize. While supernatural beliefs wane in the USA, believers still hold a majority, in and out of the AA meeting. But Jan K's point is the need for equal time and ink to displaying that nonbeliever's approach to, and success with, AA is neither second-class nor intellectual stubbornness as described by our early more religious AAs. Jan's point here, is that by only having *The "God" Word: Agnostics and Atheists in AA*<sup>vi</sup> in three languages, we discriminate against and disadvantage other newcomers/members who speak other languages.

Czechs are the third least theistic people in the world. In China, 90% of people are atheist and/or are not religious. Then it's Sweden at 76% and Czech Republic at 75% who don't believe in a creator, interventionist higher power.

The principles of AA work for anyone. The wording includes some and excludes others. This is a plausible reason why AA is losing members outside the USA in countries where gods are mythical, while growing inside America where idolization of supernatural agency is still culturally supported.

Service Material from the General Service Office  
**ESTIMATES OF A.A. GROUPS AND MEMBERS**  
**AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2020 <sup>1</sup>**

	Groups	Members
<b>United States</b>		
	69,812	1,438,253
<b>Canada</b>	5,137	86,790
<b>Sub-Total:</b>	<b>74,949</b>	<b>1,525,043</b>
<b>Correctional Facilities</b>	1,559	39,170
<b>Loners, Internationalist, Homers</b>	1	199
<b>U.S. &amp; Canada Total:</b>	<b>76,509</b>	<b>1,564,412</b>
<b>Outside U.S. &amp; Canada <sup>2</sup></b>	53,281	573,789
<b>Worldwide Total:</b>	<b>129,790</b>	<b>2,138,201</b>

<sup>1</sup> The General Service Office does not keep membership records. The information shown here is based on reports given by groups listed with G.S.O., and does not represent an actual count of those who consider themselves A.A. members.

<sup>2</sup> We are aware of A.A. activity in approximately 180 countries, including 64 autonomous general service offices in other lands. Annually we attempt to contact those G.S.O.s and groups that request to be listed in our records. Where current data is lacking we use an earlier year's figures.

In this Washington Post report<sup>vii</sup> 66% of the United Kingdom and 53% of Canadians are atheist and/or not religious. Even Israel, mecca to all three Abrahamic faiths is 65% non-believers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Jan sees the emphasis on a prayer answering, sobriety granting higher power has hindering – not helping – AA growth in her town and the reason is obvious. While America embraces beliefs in higher powers customized from a Christian God, even youth in America are less inclined to embrace this traditional culture. Remembering that we AA's have a common suffering but varieties of individual AA recoveries, crafted from any/every worldview, the

Czech delegate was making a case for more of the practical, secular narrative vs. a straight diet of god-granted recovery. And I think she speaks for many of us – outside the USA of course, but for a growing number of American newcomers.

Changing demographics suggest that all of AA ought to be flexible and openminded to Europe's apathy to AA theology. It may foreshadow a sea change in AA in our American homeland. Even in the USA – the most religious developed country in the world – a new study shows that less than ½ of Americans are members of churches now.

" The new [Gallup poll](#), published Monday, indicates that religious membership in the U.S. has fallen to just 47% among those surveyed – representing less than half of the adult population for the first time since Gallup began asking the question more than 80 years ago. ... Since the turn of the century, there has been a near doubling in the percentage of traditionalists [Silent Generation] (from 4% to 7%), Baby Boomers (from 7% to 13%) and Gen X (11% to 20%) with no religious affiliation," Gallup says.

However, Gallup points out that demographic shifts, not a sudden disaffection among the religious, appear to account for much of that change, "with those in



older generations who were likely to be church members being replaced in the U.S. adult population with people in younger generations who are less likely to belong."

Even with those declines, 66% of traditionalists, 58% of baby boomers, 50% of those in Generation X and 36% of millennials said they belong to a church, synagogue or mosque. "The limited data Gallup has on church membership among the portion of Generation Z that has reached adulthood are so far showing church membership rates similar to those for millennials," Gallup said."<sup>viii</sup>

The 2021 class of newcomers – most places in the world – do not have the same beliefs and attitudes of 1941, 1961 or even 1991 newcomers to AA.

Sometime last century, someone quipped that AA was the “last house on the block” and that caught on. Also, sometimes heard is “If God drives them out, drink will drive them back.”

Today, what may have been “the last house on the block,” AA is now one of hundreds of welcoming houses with porchlights on, in a growing subdivision of mutual aid/peer to peer. Some AA members today are also involved with other mutual aid groups (She Recovers, Dharma Recovery, Life Ring, SMART recovery, Alcoholics Victorious, Debtors Anonymous Food Addicts Anonymous, Sex & Love Addicts Anonymous, Women for Sobriety, NA, Al-Anon, etc), thereby not being solely reliant on AA for their ongoing recovery.<sup>ix</sup>

When AA grew in members every decade, from the 1935 to 1995, the primacy of AA was not challenged. No recovery podcasts or social media, online resources or as many mutual aid alternatives were available. AA and our 12-Step oriented communities are, for now, still ubiquitous. AA is well known (if not well understood) and available broadly, online or face-to-face.

If you live in the USA you might think AA is growing and will never fade away.

If you live anywhere else, and have been sober since 2000, your AA is smaller today than the end of the last century.

Support systems like treatment centers and court referrals based on 12-step models still dominates the US landscape. Not so in the more science based, less religious world. Every new century, while appreciating the past, evolves into new language and mediums for getting information or finding community. A 2012 survey<sup>x</sup> released by Partnership for Drug-Free Kids and The New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Use Services found:

1. 10 percent of all American adults, ages 18 and older, consider themselves to be in recovery from drug or alcohol abuse problems.
2. These nationally representative findings indicate that there are 23.5 million American adults who are overcoming an involvement with drugs or alcohol that they once considered to be problematic.

In the USA, of the 23.5 million people in recovery, 20 million are not in AA. They aren't getting sober by themselves necessarily by they are taking advantage of the wealth of options created in part by an AA generation – whose resistance to accommodating and encouraging more pioneering ways within – left AA to join together with others and do/create their own thing.

### SO FAR THIS MILLENNIUM

In the last of the one-time “triennial” [AA Membership Survey](#) (2014)<sup>xi</sup> inside AA:

- 61% are sober five years or less, 22% are sober over 20 years and the average AA is sober almost 10 years.
- AAs, on average, went to 2.5 meetings per week in 2014.
- ¾ of members were introduced to AA through treatment/medical care and 84% of these, credit treatment as having a significant contribution to their recovery.
- 8 out of 10 have a sponsor, 6 out of 10 identified as male, 9 out 10 are Caucasian.

This measures uninterrupted sobriety. Some of these AAs also have decades of previous AA experience not counted, here. Someone with two months of sobriety might have 20 years of AA experience and know-how, including other bouts of positive, active, sober living. There is plenty more I would like to know about AA members than the survey reveals, but the pamphlet is not designed for me; it's created by Public Information, gathering key information they believe non-alcoholics with an interest in AA would want to know about our AA members and meetings. Still, I find it helpful, too.

Tradition Nine's refrain, “AA “ought never be organized” is recognizable in our method of tracking members/groups, each year. No one has to sign up or apply for AA membership. Any gathering of alcoholics can call themselves an AA group without applying for a group-number or participating in the General Service structure. And still, the General Service Office is at their service. We favour autonomy and anonymity (privacy) over organization and record keeping in our AA creed. The data we do record still offers a relevant year-over-year comparison. While the totals are not expected to be exact and accurate, using the same flawed system one year over the next, offers a comparison or a trend that tells a story.

Here, we look at Groups and Members on January 1, 2000, January 1, 2020 and January 1, 2021. We show one-year changes and the difference so far this century (2000 to 2021) in percentages.

One big question during COVID: was if AA grew or declined?

We added 60,827 members in the year ending January 1, 2021. The 2,138,201 (total estimated members) number rivals the all-time-high in members in 2001: 2,214,978. AA added 4,233 new groups in the Year of COVID-19, too.

AA	2000 Groups	2020 Groups	2021 Groups	Difference	2000 Members	2020 Members	2021 Members	Difference
USA	51,151	64,526	69,812	36.50%	1,161,436	1,361,471	1,438,253	23.80%
Canada	5,132	5,175	5,137	0.10%	97,504	87,840	86,790	-11.00%
World	40,222	54,297	53,281	32.50%	666,412	588,703	573,789	-13.90%
incarcerated	2,519	1,559	1,559	-38.10%	64,723	39,170	39,170	-39.50%
Totals	99,024	125,557	129,790	31.10%	1,990,504	2,077,374	2,138,201	7.40%

But a trend we reported last year continues:

- AA is made up of 24% more members in the USA so far this century.
- Canada's 86,790 members is a decline from a year ago, and 10,714 fewer AA members than at the turn of the century (-11%),
- Outside USA/Canada we see fewer members year over year and since the turn of the century. At 573,789, this is 92,623 (-14%), compared to January 2000.

So AA today is 67% American members, worldwide, up from 58% at the millennium's beginning. In the 1980s and early 1990s USA membership was under 50% when growth was most pronounced overseas. We were truly a fellowship of the world. Worth noting, while the healthy USA grew the number of groups in 21 years by 36.5%, which is great, secular AA groups grew about 1,000%, worldwide this century, including the USA. There were less than 50 agnostic, atheist, humanist AA meetings in 2000 and at least ten times the January 1, 2000 number, now. While agnostic/atheist AA groups are a small fraction of AA, members and groups are growing worldwide.

We discussed the falloff of membership outside America was already noted this time last year, in our [2020 report](#).<sup>xii</sup> We talked about people who leave AA and others who stay. This is neither good, nor bad, not a reflection of AA effectiveness nor individual appreciation for AA/sobriety. Why assume that people leaving AA is a failure of AA? If people get what they need from AA and move on, that sounds like a positive feature of AA. That's a legitimate AA success story. Yes, the individual is a success story, too. Also, staying in AA is not an unhealthy dependency; many continue with AA decades into overcoming the drink-problem, ranging from periodic to regular attendance and engagement.

"AA careers," is how researchers categorize or variety of AA experiences. Findings reveal that some come to AA, engage by joining a meeting and creating a recovery posse and after a time — one year, three years, five years — they stop going to meetings.

There is this doomsday parable within AA about how every relapse starts with not going to meetings anymore. No lie – people do track their relapse’s back, step by step and see that not going to meetings was a turning point in compromising their recovery routine and priority. Also true is that safe, meaningful lives start with stopping or fewer meetings, too. What happens in these success stories is that the alcoholics built up their *recovery capital*<sup>xiii</sup>. Their recovery becomes self-sustaining, as described by researchers. As newcomers, our world may be chaos and dysfunction. The lion’s share of our recovery capital comes from the peer-to-peer community when the rest of our world is on fire. Over time, treatment, aftercare, books, or other physical and mental health professionals encourage selfcare and prosocial behavior. The result in strengthening our inner resource muscle, this recovery capital extends to personal, social and community networks, further enhancing lifestyle, family, work and community engagement.

“... recovery takes place on three levels: as a personal journey to wellbeing and belonging; as a social process of positive and valued relationships; and as a social movement that creates a sense of pride and positive identity.”<sup>xiv</sup>

So not everyone who stops or reduces AA attendance is setting themselves up for relapse. The questions to ask is if the supports needed – no one recovers alone, even if they never come to a mutual aid group or goes to treatment – is manifesting in the CHIME dynamic (Connection, Hope, Identity, Meaning, Empowerment) beyond the peer-to-peer group. “Graduates” of AA may be our greatest *selling* feature: one does not become AA dependent in order to overcome substance or process dependence. Also, within AA (or any other peer2peer group) we can sustain CHIME, long-term, especially for extroverts who welcome the AA experience and thrive in our dynamic community.

Revisiting the secret to why ye olde AA is embraced less, outside of the USA, I am sure, is a number of factors. This year we see Jan from the Czech Republic thinks more irreligious literature would be more relatable to newcomers. There are no Czech secular AA groups that I know of; yet. Included in rapidly increasing secular AA movement includes diversity: More Portuguese, Polish, Spanish, and French and Greek language meetings have started. Maybe Jan heard about ICSAA Europe, the first virtual International Conference of Secular AA June 19<sup>th</sup> (<https://secularaa.eu>) There are young peoples, BIPOC, women’s and LGBTQ+ agnostic/atheist groups. We see groups that met once or twice a week back in a brick-and-mortar setting are adding meetings or going every night of the week.

Like non-theists, other underrepresented populations are finding each other online. BIPOC meetings (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) have come online since the pandemic began. Variety and creativity is coming to recovery via Zoom. Some record and podcast in guest/host style gatherings, there are AA History nights, town halls on AA issues, Zoom karaoke and regional roundups and conferences are all going online. Most are free now, reflecting the lower cost of providing AA online. The 2020

International Women's AA Conference beat all previous records with 19,000 members logging on in 2020. That's a pretty good preview of AA on the Millennial watch. 2021 is hybrid from Santa Fe, NM with all 2,000 in person spots reserved and plans to Zoom to the world. We see impressive adaptation, good turnout and what appears to be lower barriers to entry for sober curious drinkers checking out AA as discretely (anonymously) as they wish. Some people we only recognize by their cat's face we see on Zoom.

### **Also at the 26<sup>th</sup> World Conference of AA**

"A strong focus of delegates was on the effect the pandemic has had on Alcoholics Anonymous with respect to members' ability to meet (in person or online) as well as the challenges newcomers face in finding and connecting with A.A. In some countries, the virtual meetings that have become a staple of pandemic-era A.A. elsewhere are not possible due to lack of consistent Internet connectivity. There was the sense that virtual meetings are probably here to stay, even in a post-pandemic era, and so the group discussed how these meetings might (or might not) be connected to general service structures."

Nana K., a first-term delegate of Greece talks about how small (compared to any urban center in the USA or Canada) Greek AA is: "At the World Service Meeting, I saw people I knew from the European Service Meeting, and I felt like crying when I saw them again. I have met so many people from all over the world that I never would have been able to meet otherwise. We couldn't have afforded the trip to New York or even the virtual meeting fee, but the World Service Fund paid for us. We don't like this: we would like to be self-supporting. But in Greece, we have 21 Greek-speaking groups, eight English, two Russian and one Polish, which means we have very few contributions."xv

### **From the April USA/Canada 71<sup>st</sup> General Service Conference, April 2021**

Discussions and recommendations can have several outcomes:

1. Advisory Actions is approved in full session with substantial unanimity (2/3 vote) and is considered the informed group conscience of the fellowship.
2. Recommendations voted down are "Not Resulting in Advisory Action.
3. Recommendations Passed by Simple Majority is a majority that falls short of 2/3. This is considered a strong suggestion referred to the General Service Board for consideration and maybe action.
4. Floor Actions Not Resulting in Advisory Action were defeated or not discussed.
5. Committee Considerations happen at the committee level during the conference but are not brought to the floor for a vote. This serves as a consideration for the trustees' committee that meets four times per year (not just once).

Here's a fraction of the actionable items but pertinent to literature and AA meeting readings...



- Grapevine: change “Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women” to “... fellowship of people.” (Advisory Action)
- Drafting Fifth Edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous* (Advisory Action)
- Update storied and Appendix III and V in *Alcoholics Anonymous* (Advisory Action)
- Consider requests to revise *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* including Step 12 p. 117, mate “of the opposite sex” and Step Six, “Lustful enough to rape” and adding long form to short form of each Tradition in Twelve Traditions essays. (Advisory Action)
- Consider request to add a subtitle to *Living Sober* (Committee Consideration/Took No Action)
- *Q&A on Sponsorship* suggestion about sponsors being of the same sex to be reconsidered (Advisory Action)
- Review language about safety in AA for *Living Sober* and *Q&A on Sponsorship* (Trustee Committee Review)
- Revise pamphlets *A.A. for the Black and African-American Alcoholic*, *Twelve Traditions Illustrated*, *Too Young? Young People in A.A.*, *This is A.A.*, *Twelve Concepts Illustrated* and new pamphlet, *Spanish Speaking Women in A.A.* (various levels of approval/development)
- Create a draft for a plain language *Big Book*, a *Big Book* workbook, and accessible translations (Advisory Action + trustee’s Committee Consideration)
- Review triennial *A.A. Membership Survey* report (Committee Consideration)

Members and group of the USA and Canada had their say expressed at the April General Service Conference and once translated from English to both Spanish and French, delivering a Fall Final Report. Ask your group’s General Service Rep for a PDF version which should speed up the process making the *Final Report* more readily available and more widely read by the membership.

In a 5<sup>th</sup> Edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, while changes to the wording of the first 164 pages are off the table, there are over 400 other pages to think about.

- How can new stories in the second section show the diversity of AA experience?
- What should the Foreword (which, I know – is really a Preface, not a Foreword) say?
- How can the use of the asterisks and footnotes better tell a contemporary story of AA?

The passing of plans for a plain language *Big Book* overcomes longstanding change resistance and here’s how they did it: This idea was offered as an advisory action before but fell short of the substantial unanimity to make it so. The new book is not being framed as “re-writing the *Big Book*”. It’s “a translation of the *Big Book*.” We’ve talked about this; The 1930’s Bill W poetic stylings of the *Big Book* does not resonate with a broad swath of potential AA members. Many Americans lack the literacy acumen to

understand *Big Book* abstractions; much of what is written is over the heads of too many potential (American) newcomers, according to an AA study.

Will/could a new plain language be less monotheistic? How about less patriarchal, American-centric and heteronormative? What about unscientific or outdated terms like the “allergy” theory of alcoholism? What about the word “alcoholism” itself? If the newcomer was referred to us by a medical professional, the diagnosis was “alcohol use disorder.” Should we speak the newcomer’s language or ask them to conform to our nostalgic terminology. How would we write a book about AA today, knowing what we know today, for members today and tomorrow?

Well here’s our chance, AA is listening. Let’s show up. Regional Forums, Area Assemblies, our own home groups, these are places where this will be talked about. Write directly to the literature desk at the General Service Office.

From last year, GSO has extended their deadline for stories of people who found sobriety late in life (60+) and the reason for the extension is the submitted stories lack diversity. How many white male theists heterosexual Americans do we need in one pamphlet. So, if you’ve ever complained about AA literature... well here’s a chance to reach people just like you with your story.

### **Millennial Supremacy in peer2peer recovery starts Now!**

In 2020, Millennials, 25 to 40-years-old, became the largest adult population in the USA – outnumbering Baby Boomers. The USA is home to 75 million Millennials (1980-1996) in the USA where most AAs live. Boomers, we are so last century. Boomers (1946-1965) peaked at 79 million in 1999(USA) and some of us died of over the last two decades.

Gen X, you are the middle-child generation like a princess that never gets to be queen. Hey, at least you’re the average AA right now Gen X (1966-1979). The average AA is 50 years old – that’s you, Xers.

So, I’m not going to skip over your generation; you might have been born at Woodstock; how cool is that? You rented Reality Bites, Boyz N the Hood, The Breakfast Club and Dazed and Confused from Block Buster – you might have even worked there. Here are the characteristics of GenX:

Self-reliant, critical thinkers, flexible, independent, resistance to being defined (hence the label Generation “X”).<sup>xvi</sup>

Wait, are those qualities fostered in AA? There is good reason why you are self-reliant, sandwiched in between two extroverted generations. But yeah, was 12-step philosophy playing to your strengths? Is this a clue as to why our fellowship stopped growing in

1992; we didn't know how to talk to that year's young newcomer – not without dissing them? In my own recovery timeline, I remember seeing the under-21 percentage of membership in AA going from 1, to 2, to 3%. It peaked in 1989. Here's how AA looked when I was turning 29 and 13 years sober:

Thirty-five percent are women, 22% are under 31 years of age, and 3% are under 21 years of age. Fifty-six percent are from 31 to 50, and 23% are older than 50<sup>xvii</sup>

We thought the youth squad would keep increasing, more young AA's, progressive ideas... Instead, starting in 1990, representation of youth, replacements from the X generation didn't replace the now middle-aged Baby Boomers. Instead, it went the other way, we started aging and stopped growing in total members. But how about today Xers, even if you're a trusted servant with responsibility, you are serving the fellowship which will always have more Boomers and Millennials, so the tyranny of a majority – what defines your generation according to demographers – is still your unjust fate. Some of you Gen Xers are movie stars and fortune 500 CEOs so you've showed us none of that really matters anyway, right?

While Gen X has a bone to pick with Baby Boomers, the time has passed to air this grievance. This decade, the dominant influencers are those who you're sponsoring now... Millennials.<sup>xviii</sup>

Valuable Silent Generation members are still alive and well, aged 81 or older. This is a most of where we find our members of 50 years+ of continuous sobriety. This generation's lived experience is a firsthand account of AA in the first ½ of our history (to date). This is invaluable; these elders help us avoid the idea that "the AA we know is the way it's always been" misinterpretation of history.

Looking at these early days of the Millennial era of AA, what do we know about This GenY who suffers from alcohol and other drugs?

The Young Adult Subtype as described by TheRecoveryVillage.com, are over 30% of everyone who is deemed as alcohol dependent. The average age of starting excessive drinking is 20 and they (on average) are looking for relief by age 25. 32% smoke cigarettes (more than we may have thought) and 25% smoke weed (less than we may have thought). They drink fewer days than average millennials but consume way more on the days that they do, binge drinking as we call it. Breaking them down further

- 10.1% had their first alcoholic drink at 11 years old or younger
- 37.5% had their first alcoholic drink between 12-17 years old
- 39.7% had their first alcoholic drink between 18-25 years old
- 12.6% had their first alcoholic drink at 26 years old or older<sup>xix</sup>

These are some of the young people Jan talked about in her World Conference report. New members between 14 and 21 are Generation-Z and according to our last membership survey (2014), 20,000 AA members (1 %) were under the age of 21.

Several Millennials are in AA and Dharma Recovery, and She Recovers zoom rooms, and NA and they've tried SMART Recovery, and maybe Yoga or a Mindfulness group, too. This online meeting reality puts all of AA in the kitchen of Millennials. We adapt; they were already here, online. There will be a post-pandemic, there will be more no post-Zoom meetings – or whatever platform it may be – millennials, won't be attending as many face2face meetings as nostalgic Boomers will. Our 25-40 year old members may wonder about their group spending money on having the General Service Representative driving to a Regional Forum or Area Assembly, spending group money on hotel and food and increasing AA's carbon footprint. Here are some words/phrases that describe 26 to 41-year-olds:

Ethnically and racially diverse, global thinkers, pragmatic idealists, authentic and transparent, liberal, compassionate and progressive, team-oriented, irreligious (38% atheists, 19% *something*-ists, 25% believe in gods. While like all Americans, there are more religious millennials in the USA, but there are still 29% atheist compared to ½ that number for Baby Boomers. Both male and female millennials buy more apparel, more often than any generation ever. Millennials are multi-taskers, impatient and adventurous.<sup>xx</sup>

So will spiritual – not religious AA help millennials see the light of God, where church could not? Or will Gen Y change AA to better reflect multiple pathways? Or will they find AA rigid and put their time in with friends they already know in other fellowships? If there is a 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary convention for AA, millennials will be there, as stewards of AA, aged 40 to 55-years-old.

## **In Conclusion**

If you're toying with the idea of getting active in AA service or active with any peer2peer group, this is a happening time. Why not be part of the change? Or, fight change, if that's your jam. Either way, now is the time. Why AA is in contraction everywhere other than the United States is worth talking about. It is too late to get exit surveys for those who left, but what grievances do our fellow members have that maybe we could listen to a little closer? We know that people with alcohol use disorder who found AA outside the USA, found it lacking and left. Did they drink, did they join Refuge Recovery or SMART or go to NA where their poly-drug use story finds a less hostile audience? People vote with their feet and this, "Just say 'No' to AA" trend doesn't mean they are just not ready. What is it about the culture of Alcoholics Anonymous that makes us less inviting of the world stage that back in the US, back in the US of A?

On several fronts we see contrary trends. Secular AA, for instance, is growing as fast or faster per capita in Canada, Europe, Australia and the rest of the world. Most of these 2021 new groups have never had brick-and-mortar locations.

So what district and Area do you join if you have members from six states, three provinces and four other countries? General Service is working to accommodate this phenomenon. It is all good. Let's keep talking.

BIPOC is growing in the new-normal of online. I was at a meeting where the term BIPOC got challenged, it's a place marker more than a perfect inclusive identity. One member wondered who coined "People of Colour?" was it a racially marginalized person? AA for the Native North American came up. Mexico is part of North America, but somehow the constituency doesn't seem to count one of the three countries of North America.

Rebellion Dogs reports on where we are; where we might be going is up to all of us. This era is not yet scripted; we can have some agency in the next era of AA.

What do you think? Is it a problem that AA is shrinking outside the USA? Do you think we understand why? I'm not so sure? There is a message in people voting with their feet. Why do you think AA is shrinking while alcohol and other drug use problems are not shrinking? What do you think we should do? Accept it? Make changes? Jump in; I think some of the right questions are being asked...will there be a conservative backlash, do you think, to changes. What debates do you think there should be about this plain language Big Book? Let us know at [rebelliondogspublishing.com](http://rebelliondogspublishing.com), on social media, you know; What'sApp, Twitter, Facebook, email. We are all in this together.

The podcast version of Episode 58, as always, ends with some of the best music you've never heard, borrowed from my IndieCan Radio<sup>xxi</sup> work.

Ken Tizzard and Friends has a new record that dropped May 18, 2021 on vinyl or digital called, *All Together Now* – "an epic project involving 44 guest musicians contributing parts from all over the continent.

"When I let the news out, people started responding – 'hey, if there's anything I can do to help?'," Ken recalls. "Then the idea just hit me. Make it an open call to everybody. That was my next Facebook post, inviting anybody who wanted to be involved. 'If you have any way to record and if you like any of these songs, email me and we'll talk about what you can do.'

The response just snowballed!"

Tizzard posted a list of the 13 songs he had in mind for the record, and then, he explains, "I started putting the puzzle together. I got a big sheet of paper, listing the



songs, the guests, what instruments they played, and started assembling it.”

In terms of what we’ve been talking about over the last few years @ Rebellion Dogs, mental wellness has been a challenge for all of us, exacerbated by a existential threat of COVID global pandemic. In reaction, some thrive and some wither, some are prolific, and some are stuck. This story of how the Ken Tizzard album came together is a



CHIME example at work. Connection was created, it spawned Hope, Identity, Meaning, Empowerment. One person reaches out, creates community, the come together as musicians and the pandemic – a once in a lifetime situation when all these players are home and available – no one’s on the road – the find meaning and empowerment by making this happen. As always, it always starts with reversing disconnection, and with connection... everything is possible.

The novel creative process involved Ken recording a rough demo of each tune, vocal and acoustic guitar only, and sending that out to the volunteering musical guests, giving them complete freedom for the parts they would send in. “There were only a couple of instances where I went back and asked the player for a change,” he notes. “That is remarkable given that everybody played without hearing what the other guests played.”

*All Together Now<sup>xxii</sup>* includes songs by Tears For Fears, Tom Petty, Bob Dylan, Neil Young, The Boomtown Rats, The Clash, The Cure, Billy Bragg, and R.E.M. Ken Tizzard explains that Tears For Fears’ “Mad World” “developed into a booming rock song once I confirmed that [Nickelback drummer] Daniel Adair and [Hedley bassist] Tommy Mac would be working together.”

<https://www.rebelliondogspublishing.com/rebellious-radio/blog/ep-58-summer-2021-millennials-take-the-helm-for-mutual-aid-groups>

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- <sup>i</sup> *As Bill Sees It*, A.A. World Services, p. 115
- <sup>ii</sup> A Freethinker in Alcoholics Anonymous, John Lauritsen, 2014 <https://amzn.to/3yvGErX>
- <sup>iii</sup> [https://aa.org/assets/en\\_US/f-150\\_26th\\_WSM\\_finalreport\\_2020.pdf](https://aa.org/assets/en_US/f-150_26th_WSM_finalreport_2020.pdf)
- <sup>iv</sup> The All-Scandinavian Convention of *Young People in Alcoholics Anonymous* <http://www.scancypaa.org/>
- <sup>v</sup> [https://www.aa.org/assets/en\\_US/p-84\\_manypathstospirituality.pdf](https://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/p-84_manypathstospirituality.pdf) Bill W's speech at the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Toronto International AA Convention (1965).
- <sup>vi</sup> [https://www.aa.org/assets/en\\_US/p-86\\_theGodWord.pdf](https://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/p-86_theGodWord.pdf)
- <sup>vii</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/04/14/map-these-are-the-worlds-least-religious-countries/>
- <sup>viii</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/30/982671783/fewer-than-half-of-u-s-adults-belong-to-a-religious-congregation-new-poll-shows>
- <sup>ix</sup> *It works, but why does it work? Perspectives on change in 12-step and non-12-step mutual-help groups - Recovery Research Institute* ([recoveryanswers.org](http://recoveryanswers.org))
- <sup>x</sup> <https://drugfree.org/newsroom/news-item/survey-ten-percent-of-american-adults-report-being-in-recovery-from-substance-abuse-or-addiction/>
- <sup>xi</sup> *P-48 - 2014 Membership Survey* ([aa.org](http://aa.org))
- <sup>xii</sup> <https://rebelliondogspublishing.com/online-secular-aa-meetings-rebellion-dogs-publishing/blog/a-2020-look-at-aa-s-year-in-review-progressives-and-traditionalst-baby-zoomers>
- <sup>xiii</sup> *Recovery Capital Assessment Plan and Scale - ReCAPS 160717.3200420.pdf* ([brauchtworks.com](http://brauchtworks.com))
- <sup>xiv</sup> Best, David, *Pathways to Recovery and Desistance: The role of the social contagion of hope*, Bristol: Policy Press, 2019 (p. 178)
- <sup>xv</sup> *Box 459 - Spring 2021 - The Virtual 26th World Service Meeting: Separated Physically, Connecting Spiritually* ([aa.org](http://aa.org))
- <sup>xvi</sup> <https://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/generation-x-characteristics-history/>
- <sup>xvii</sup> *Comments on AA's Triennial Surveys (Remastered)* ([hams.cc](http://hams.cc))
- <sup>xviii</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/28/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers-as-americas-largest-generation/>
- <sup>xix</sup> <https://www.therecoveryvillage.com/alcohol-abuse/types-alcoholics/>
- <sup>xx</sup> <https://luckyattitude.co.uk/millennial-characteristics/>
- <sup>xxix</sup> <http://indiecan.com>
- <sup>xxii</sup> <https://kentizzard.com/music>