



## **Sharing Session Area 19, Chicago**

**Presentation by Michelle Mirza,  
G.S.O. Archivist**

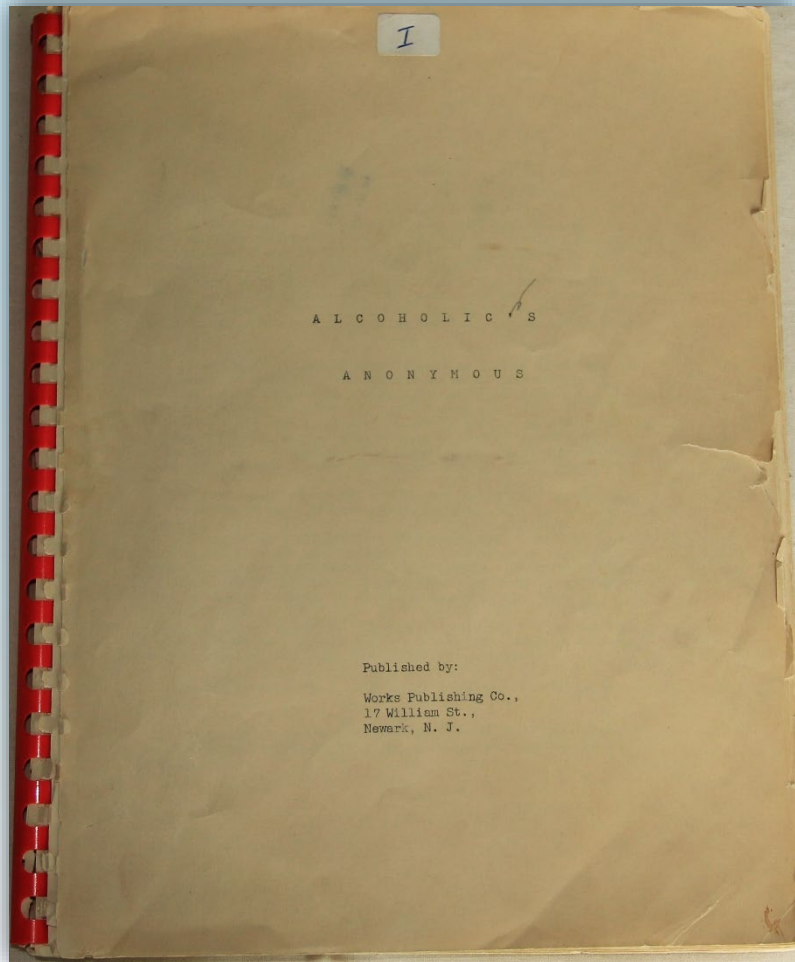
**A.A.'s Big Book,  
*Alcoholics Anonymous***

## G.S.O. Archives Mission

The mission of the Alcoholics Anonymous General Service Office Archives is to document permanently the work of Alcoholics Anonymous, to make the history of the organization accessible to A.A. members and other researchers, and to provide a context for understanding A.A.'s progression, principles and traditions.



# From manuscript to published work – A.A.'s Big Book



# First Edition Big Book

- **16 printings (April 1939 – August 1954)**
- **Approximately 300,000 copies printed**



## FIRST EDITION, 2<sup>ND</sup> PRINTING, MARCH 1941

Text in the second paragraph of the Foreword changed between the first and second printings

It is important that we remain anonymous because we are too few, at present, to handle the overwhelming number of personal appeals which may result from this publication. Being mostly business or professional folk we could not well carry on our occupations in such an event. We would like it understood that our alcoholic work is an avocation.

1<sup>st</sup> printing

It is important that we remain anonymous in order to more effectively handle the overwhelming number of personal appeals which may result from this publication. Being mostly business or professional folk some of us could not carry on our occupations if known. We would like it understood that our alcoholic work is an avocation.

2<sup>nd</sup> printing

## FIRST EDITION, 2<sup>ND</sup> PRINTING, MARCH 1941

### Repetitive sentence in first printing:

“She had looked for me last evening after I left the car and **wondered off into last evening after I left the car and wandered off into the night.**”

### Corrected in second printing:

“I left the car and wandered off into the night.”

- “Our Southern Friend”

**In the second printing of the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition the personal story “Lone Endeavor” was removed and replaced with “Now We Are Two Thousand. March 1941”**

NOW WE ARE TWO THOUSAND.  
MARCH, 1941

*W*HEN this book appeared in April 1939 there were approximately 100 A.A. members. Two thirds of them were at Akron, Ohio, or nearby communities in the northern part of that state. Most of the remainder were in or near New York City and a few others were scattered along the Atlantic Seaboard. The work had then been in existence over four years. It had been satisfactorily demonstrated that at least two out of three alcoholics who wished to get well could apparently do so, notwithstanding the fact that their chance of recovery upon any other medical or spiritual basis had been almost nil—a small percentage at best.

Publication of the book, which set down our experience and methods at length, opened a new and unexplored phase which meant an attempt to carry the work to other localities, widespread publicity, and the exposure of our methods to the test of approval or disapproval by religion, medicine, and the general public—an uncharted field indeed. Would theologians complain of our lack of orthodoxy? Would physicians frown upon the idea of banding together great numbers of alcoholics for mutual aid through a spiritual common denominator? Would reviewers and columnists ridicule the religious content of the work, thus prejudicing the men and women we were trying to help? Would alco-

**Appendix II added to the second printing of the First Edition Big Book, clarifying the change of the phrase “spiritual experience” to “spiritual awakening.”**

APPENDIX II

THE terms “spiritual experience” and “spiritual awakening” are used many times in this book which, upon careful reading, shows that the personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism has manifested itself among us in many different forms.

Yet it is true that our first printing gave many readers the impression that these personality changes, or religious experiences, must be in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals. Happily for everyone, this conclusion is erroneous.

In the first few chapters a number of sudden revolutionary changes are described. Though it was not our intention to create such an impression, many alcoholics have nevertheless concluded that in order to recover they must acquire an immediate and overwhelming “God-consciousness” followed at once by a vast change in feeling and outlook.

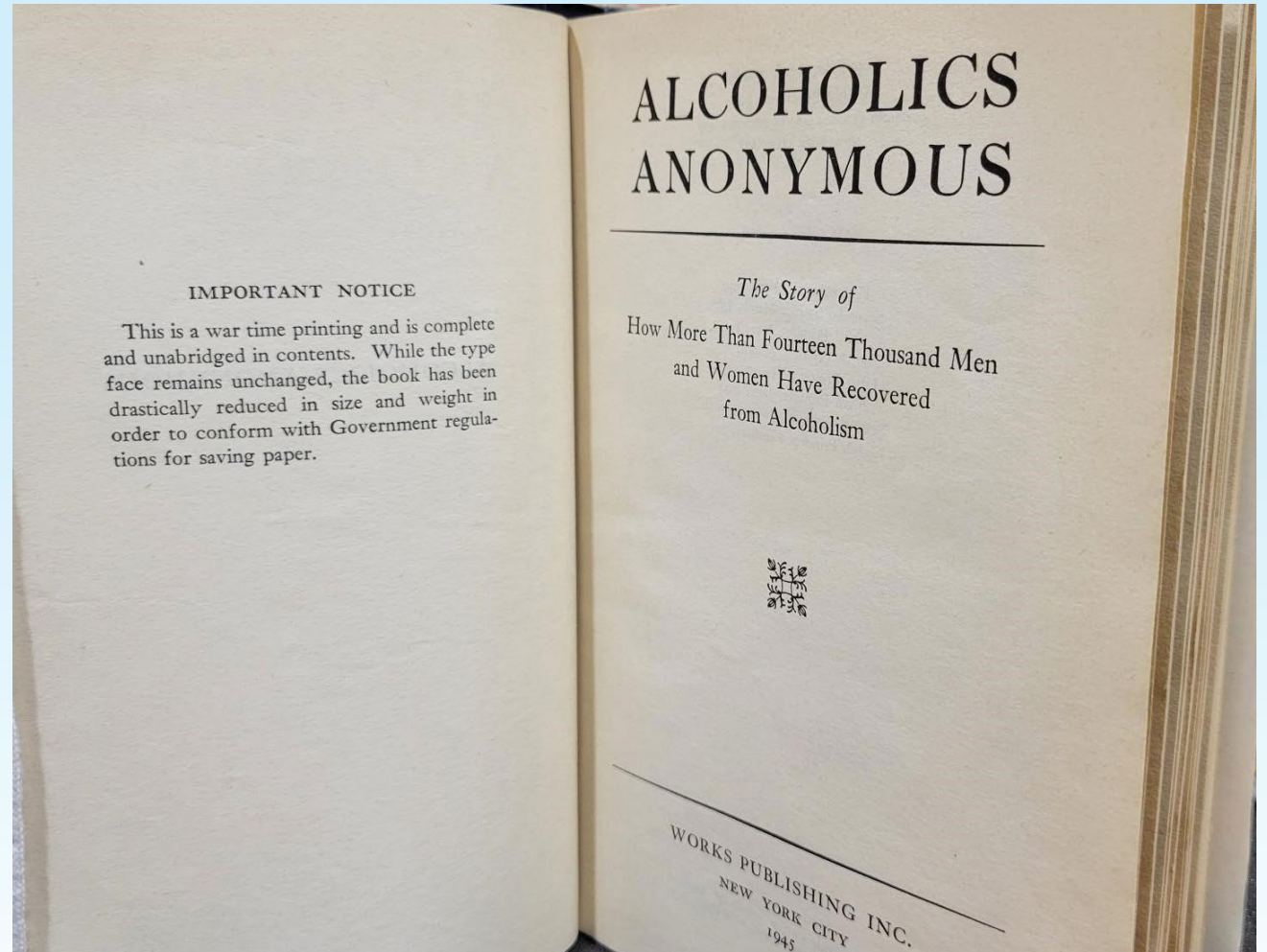
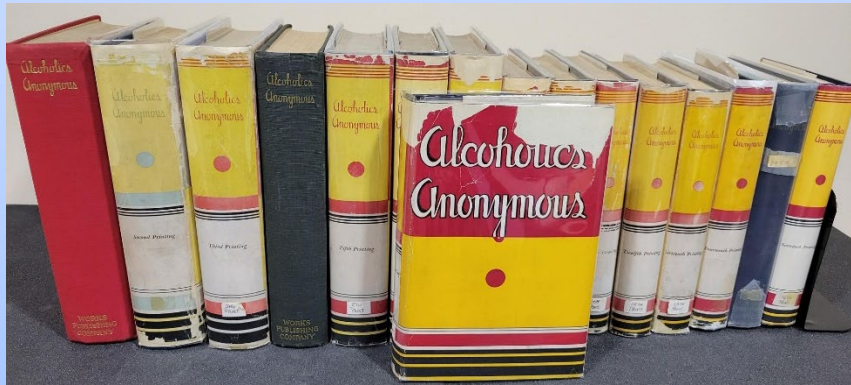
Among our rapidly growing membership of some 2000 alcoholics such transformations, though frequent, are by no means the rule. Most of our experiences are what the psychologist William James calls the “educational variety” because they develop slowly over a period of time. Quite often friends of the newcomer are aware of the difference long before he is himself. He finally realizes that he has undergone a profound altera-

**At the 1969 General Service Conference, Bill W. shared on the history of changing “spiritual experience” to “spiritual awakening.”**

**A recorded excerpt of Bill’s sharing can be found on aa.org: <https://www.aa.org/Bill-W-at-the-1969-General-Service-Conference>**

# First Edition 8<sup>th</sup> Printing Big Book

Known as the “war-time” printing, this 8<sup>th</sup> printing (1945) was reduced in size to conform with Government’s regulations for saving paper.



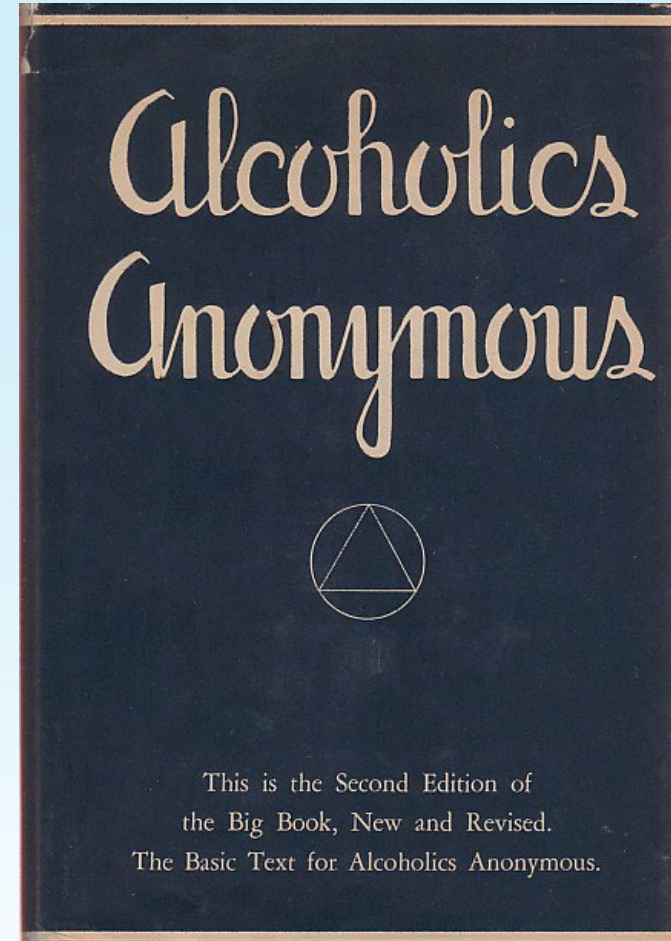
# Second Edition Big Book

- **16 printings, hard cover (1955 – 1974)**
- **Estimated over one million books distributed**



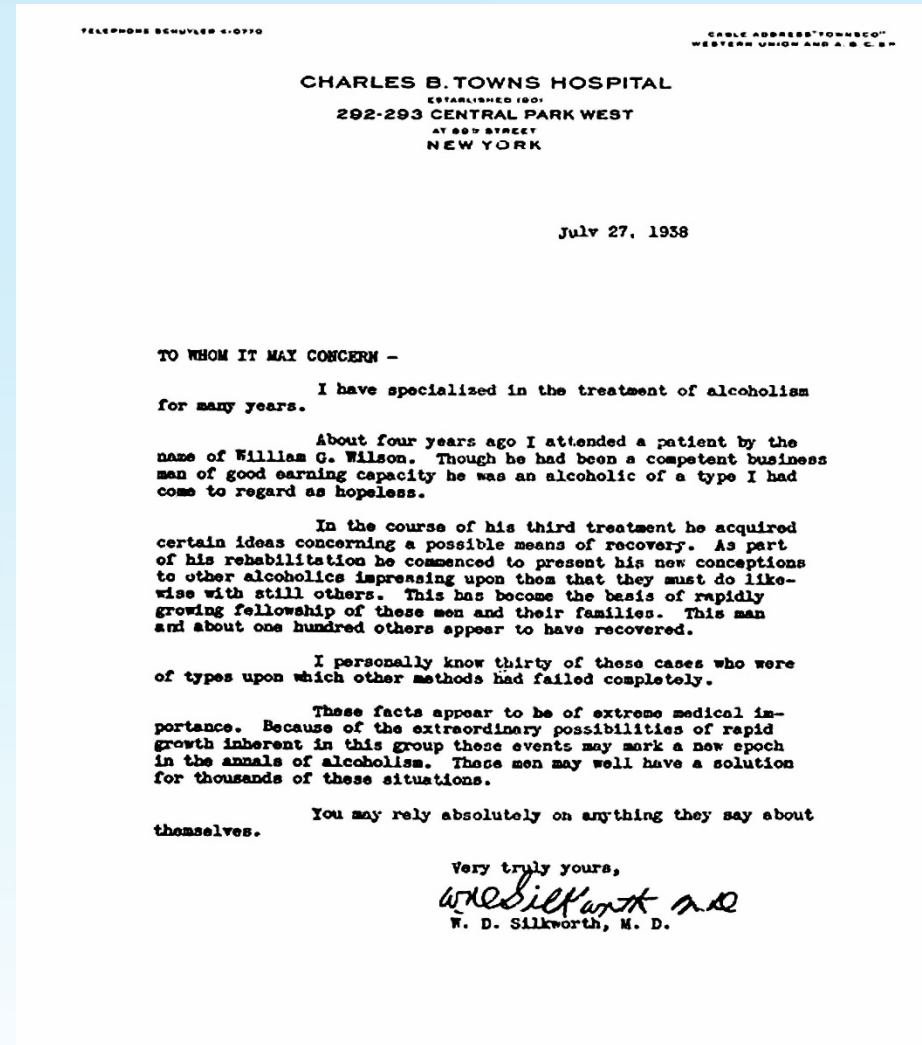
## Second Edition Big Book 1955

**Bill W.  
introduced the  
Second Edition  
Big Book at the  
1955 General  
Service  
Conference**



## Second Edition Big Book 1955

- ❑ “The Doctor’s Opinion” was moved from page 1 in the First Edition to roman numeral page xxiii in the Second Edition.
- ❑ Dr. Silkworth’s name added to the reprinted letter - “The Doctor’s Opinion.”



## Second Edition Big Book 1955

**Five new appendices added. Appendix II Spiritual Experience retained.**

- Appendix I – The A.A. Tradition
- Appendix III – The Medical View On A.A.
- Appendix IV – The Lasker Award
- Appendix V – The Religious View On A.A.
- Appendix VI – How To Get In Touch With A.A.

## Second Edition Big Book 1955

### “Herbert Spencer” quote – What’s the story?

The “Spencer” quote first appeared at the beginning of the story “An Artist’s Concept” in the First Edition Big Book. This story was removed when the Second Edition was published.

The quote was reinserted in the Third Printing of the Second Edition in 1959, at the end of Appendix II.



## Third Edition Big Book 1976

The Third Edition Big Book was approved by the General Service Conference in 1976.

### **1976 Conference Advisory Action:**

*Delegates take back to their areas a statement to the effect that the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, third edition, is not being changed – that only the stories have been updated and some new ones added.*

## Third Edition Big Book, 1976

- 74 printings (1976 – 2001)
- Over 12 million books printed (12,859,733)



## The Voice of the Fellowship Is Expressed

### 1978 Conference Advisory Action:

- 1. In the next printing of Alcoholics Anonymous, the foreword of the second edition be included as it originally published in the second edition.*
- 2. The delegates should be made aware of any changes under consideration in the book Alcoholics Anonymous prior to publication.*



Sketch of a GSC session in 1978

# Third Edition Big Book

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## FOREWORD

period were being ironed out, public acceptance of A.A. grew by leaps and bounds. For this there were two principal reasons: the large numbers of recoveries, and reunited homes. **These made their impressions everywhere. Of alcoholics who came to A.A. and really tried, 50% got sober at once and remained that way: 25% sobered up after some relapses, and among the remainder, those who stayed on with A.A. showed improvement. Other thousands came to a few A.A. meetings and at first decided they didn't want the program. But great numbers of these—about two out of three—began to return as time passed.**

Another reason for the wide acceptance of A.A. was the ministration of friends—friends in medicine, religion, and the press, together with innumerable others who became our able and persistent advocates. Without such support, A.A. could have made only the slowest progress. Some of the recommendations of A.A.'s early medical and religious friends will be found further on in this book.

Alcoholics Anonymous is not a religious organization. Neither does A.A. take any particular medical point of view, though we cooperate widely with the men of medicine as well as with the men of religion.

Alcohol being no respecter of persons, we are an accurate cross section of America and, in distant lands, the same democratic evening up process is now going on. By personal religious affiliation, we include Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Hindus, and a sprinkling of Moslems and Buddhists. More than fifteen per cent of us are women.

**At present, our membership is pyramiding at the rate of about twenty per cent a year. So far, upon the**

**Two Statements in the Second Edition Forward omitted when the Third Edition was published. These were reinstated in the Fourth Printing of the Third Edition, following action of the 1978 GSC.**

## The Voice of the Fellowship Is Expressed

### 1993 Conference Advisory Action:

Because of strong sentiment against any changes in the first 164 pages of the Big Book, the request to rewrite the first three chapters of the Big Book not be implemented.



Sketch of a GSC session in 1993

## The Voice of the Fellowship Is Expressed

### 1995 Conference Advisory Action:

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.



Sketch of a GSC session in 1995

## **A Fourth Edition Big Book is proposed in 1997**

### **1997 Conference Advisory Action:**

**A draft Fourth Edition of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, be developed and a progress report be brought back to 1998 Conference Literature Committee, keeping in mind the 1995 Advisory Action that:**

**“The first 164 pages of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, the Preface, the Forewords, ‘The Doctor’s Opinion,’ ‘Dr. Bob’s Nightmare,’ and the Appendices remain as is.”**

# Fourth Edition Big Book Approved in 2001

## 2001 Conference Advisory Action:

The Fourth Edition of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, be approved keeping in mind the 1995 Conference Advisory Action which reads, “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” and keeping in mind the 1999 Conference Action which reads, “The Publications Department of the General Service Office maintain the following specific editorial responsibilities regarding the Fourth Edition Big Book Project:

- Editorial ‘fine tuning’ such as footnotes, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, updating, jacket materials, page numbers, etc. Thus, page numbers are likely to change for content after page 164.
- Coordinating the flow of work between the book designer, typesetters, proofreaders and the production people, who order the paper and schedule the printing with the book manufacturer.
- In the case of the proposed Fourth Edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the G.S.O. editors would prepare or coordinate new material and changes such as:

### ***New Material***

Cover and jacket design  
Jacket copy  
Preface  
Foreword to the Fourth Edition

### ***Changes***

Title Page  
Contents page  
Factual material that appears in footnotes  
Introductions to personal stories.

## Fourth Edition Big Book – Text in the its Foreword deleted

### 2002 Conference Advisory Action:

Although the committee acknowledged the importance of electronic meetings to some A.A. members, the sentence “Fundamentally, though, the difference between an electronic meeting and the home group around the corner is only one of format.” in the last paragraph of the Foreword to the Fourth Edition be deleted in future printings of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

## Fourth Edition Big Book – Text in the Preface corrected

### 2014 Conference Advisory Action:

A correction to inaccurate text related to the addition of appendices on page XI in the Preface of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, which currently reads:

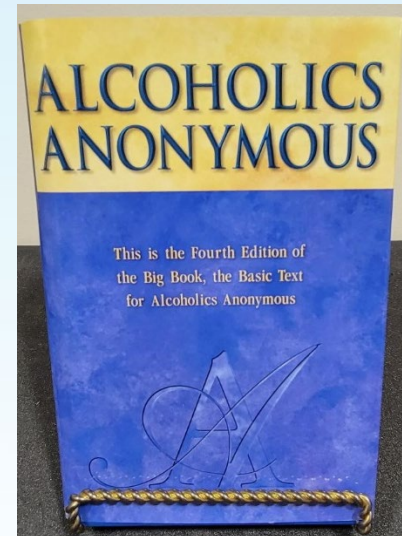
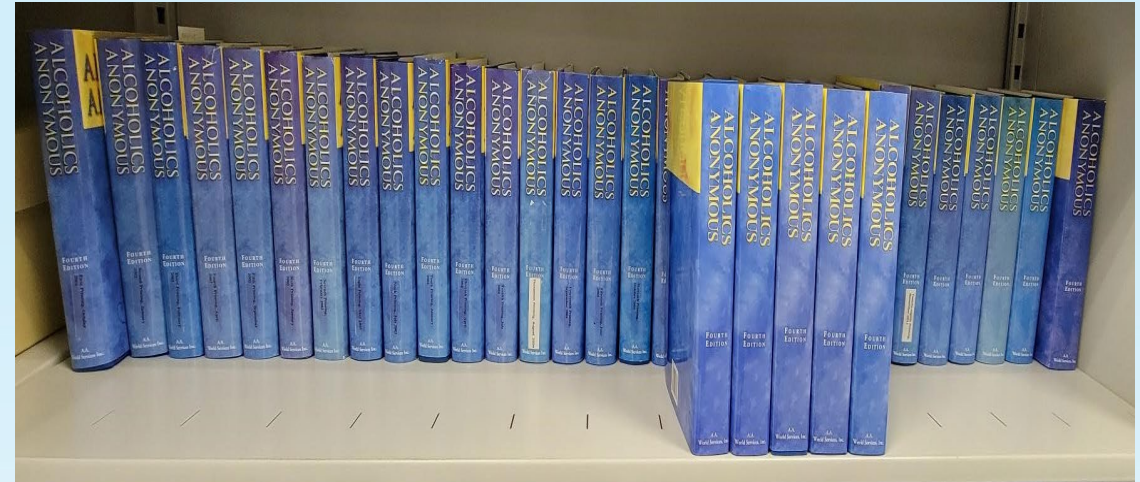
“The second edition added the appendices, the Twelve Traditions, and the directions for getting in touch with A.A.”

Be replaced with:

“The second printing of the first edition added the appendix ‘Spiritual Experience’; in the second edition, the appendices on A.A. Tradition, the ‘medical view’ and ‘religious view’ of A.A., the Lasker Award and information on how to contact A.A. were added, and the appendix on the Alcoholic Foundation was discontinued.”

# Fourth Edition Big Book 2001

- Currently at 47<sup>th</sup> printing (October 2001 – June 2022)
- Over 10 million books printed (10,292,500)



## A.A.'s Big Book: 83 Years and counting

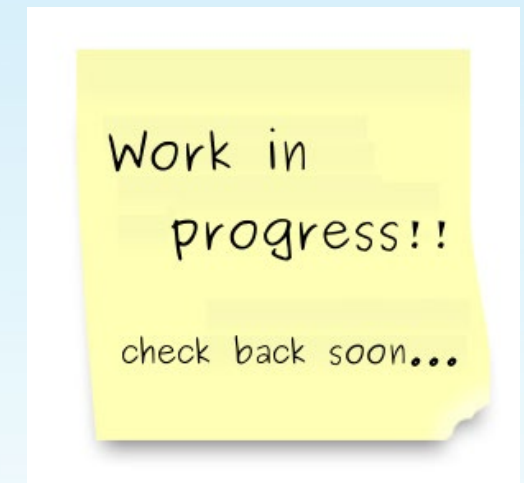
- Translated into 73 languages
- Over 40 million copies distributed (all formats)
- Four Editions (English)
- 152 printings (hard-cover only)
- Multiple formats



## What's Under Way Today?

**Two distinct projects as directed by the General Service Conference being developed:**

- 1. A translation into plain and simple language of the Fourth Edition Big Book.**
- 2. A development of a Fifth Edition Big Book.**



**Thank you!**



**Contact G.S.O. Archives**

**Email: [archives@aa.org](mailto:archives@aa.org)**

**Phone: 212-870-3400**

**[www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)**

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