

# **Heroes of Early Black AA**



# **Heroes of Early Black AA**

**Their Stories and Their Messages**

**Glenn C.  
South Bend, Indiana**

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San Francisco & South Bend**

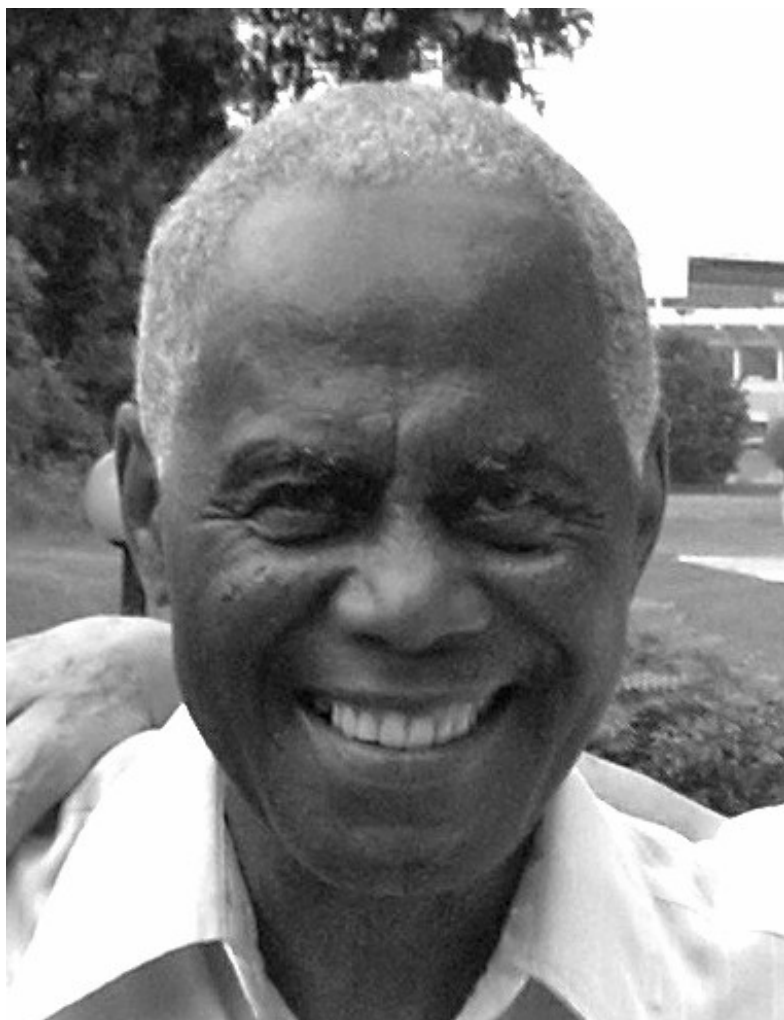
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The Hindsfoot Foundation is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1993 for the publication of materials on the history and theory of alcoholism treatment and the moral and spiritual dimensions of recovery.

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The front cover shows a photo of Joe McQuany, the most famous black A.A. member in the first seventy years of the fellowship. The page-by-page Big Book study which he first devised (with later, the additional help of Charlie Parmley) came to be called the Joe & Charlie tapes in its recorded version. These presentations have been listened to by hundreds of thousands of alcoholics, literally all over the world, and have saved the lives of untold numbers of people.

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Raymond Irving

## **This book is dedicated to Raymond Irving**

It was Raymond who served as one of my two central spiritual guides when I first came in contact with the twelve-step program. He started out as a gentleman burglar in Chicago, until alcohol and heroin put him on skid row. He finally discovered Alcoholics Anonymous in 1974, only three years after Bill Wilson's death, which made Raymond an influential early second generation A.A. leader. He was one of the best known black figures of that generation along the Chicago axis.

He is also honored to this day as one of the most revered teachers of the numerous Dignitaries Sympathy A.A. groups which stretch from one side of the nation to the other. Some of these groups still make annual pilgrimages from other states to visit one of the A.A. meeting places which he led. As one of them once commented, "the first time I saw Raymond, he just seemed to glow with light," and the others present all nodded their heads in agreement.

It was Raymond who introduced me to Jimmy Miller, the First Lady of Black A.A., and went with me to visit many other early black A.A. leaders in our area. This present book would never have existed without him quietly asking me to come with him and spend an afternoon with Jimmy Miller at her house in March 1993.

## **And also to Frank Nyikos**

Frank was Archivist for Northern Indiana Area 22, and one of the A.A. people who put me in a van in 1997 and took me to my first national Alcoholics Anonymous archival and historical conference in Akron, Ohio. That was where the A.A. history-writing bug really bit me.

And then Frank and I traveled hundreds of miles interviewing people and attending conferences and doing research. He organized the interview with Bill Williams in this volume, and typed up numerous transcripts of historical audio recordings and major historical manuscripts. This book could never have existed without him. And he was one of the best friends I have ever had.

He could sit on the patio in front of his house, and gaze at a single tiny flower nestled in the grass, and see God in and through that little flower.

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# **PART I**

## **St. Louis**

**January 24, 1945**



## CHAPTER 1

### **The First Black A.A. Group: St. Louis in January 1945**

The first black group created in the new Alcoholics Anonymous movement was formed in St. Louis on January 24, 1945. Proud of their accomplishment, they called themselves the “AA-1 Group” and chose Torrence S. as their secretary.<sup>1</sup>

Torrence wrote the New York A.A. office later on, on October 20, 1945, and explained that the compromise initially adopted in St. Louis banned black people from coming to the white A.A. meetings, but did allow them to form their own separate segregated black A.A. group.<sup>2</sup>

Slightly earlier on, in September 1945, Howard W. from the St. Louis black A.A. group had written Bobbie Burger at the Alcoholic Foundation asking the New York office and the A.A. *Grapevine* to “withhold publicity about our group that may occasion controversial discussions of racial problems within A.A.” That is, sad to say, the very existence of the black A.A. group was kept almost totally secret, *at their request*, for fear that white racists would try to raise a public controversy about it.<sup>3</sup>

The St. Louis black A.A. group started with five members, and grew quickly. A year after they began their group, in 1946 they held their First Annual Dinner Meeting, inviting several important

guests to join their celebration, including “two Negro doctors, the secretary of the YMCA, and a representative of the Urban League.”<sup>4</sup>

**Father Ed Dowling, S.J.** This Roman Catholic priest, who had long been a friend of the black community, undoubtedly played an important role in getting the white A.A.’s in St. Louis to grant the black A.A.’s the opportunity there in 1945 to set up their group.

Dowling, who was stationed in St. Louis for most of his career in the church, was a Jesuit, which was an order of Roman Catholic priests who often played a role in the Catholic Church similar to military special forces units like the U.S. Navy Seals and U.S. Army Green Berets, the British Special Air Service, and the French *Commandement des Opérations Spéciales* units — that is, the church sent the Jesuits in (anonymously in civilian clothes if necessary) where all the other Catholic priests were too scared to go, such as (for example) locations all around the globe where Roman Catholic priests, if discovered by the authorities, were automatically sentenced to hanging or some sort of death by slow torture.

The Jesuits in St. Louis had consistently been one of the groups in the forefront of the black civil rights movement in that city. In the summer of 1944 they got the first African American students admitted to St. Louis University (a great Jesuit educational institution and their pride and joy, the oldest U.S. university west of the Mississippi river). Was Father Ed inspired by that success to reach out a few months later to some black alcoholics in St. Louis whom he knew, and encourage them to take the first step towards integrating A.A. in that city by starting their own A.A. group? He had helped create and support numerous self-help groups over the course of his career, many of them of a radical nature.<sup>5</sup>

Father Dowling, although not an alcoholic himself, had learned about A.A. when he obtained a copy of the A.A. Big Book not long after it was first published. He traveled up to Chicago to see how A.A. meetings worked in actual practice, was enormously impressed, and came back to St. Louis and founded the first A.A. meeting there on October 30, 1940.<sup>6</sup>

As a side note: Father Ed had strong links with Chicago and many lifelong friends there, because when he was going through his early training in the Jesuit order, he had been assigned to teach at Loyola Academy, the Jesuit school on the north side of Chicago, from 1926 to 1929.<sup>7</sup> It is probably no accident that the second black A.A. group formed was in Chicago, only two months or so after the black A.A. group was started in St. Louis.

A month or so after starting the first A.A. group in St. Louis, in late November or early December of 1940, Father Dowling traveled to New York City to introduce himself to Bill Wilson. As a result of this meeting, he became Bill's sponsor and spiritual guide for the next twenty years, until Father Ed's death in 1960. Bill Wilson sent drafts of all the chapters in the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* to Father Ed to approve before the book was published in 1953, and one can see Father Ed's influence in various places, particularly in the chapter on the Third Tradition, which functions as a sweeping A.A. Bill of Rights. This was important to him in everything Father Ed did — all human beings had rights.<sup>8</sup>

***Father Dowling and the Dred Scott memorial:*** In 1956, Father Ed realized that the next year would mark the one hundredth anniversary of the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision.<sup>9</sup> Scott was an African-American slave who, while living in St. Louis, had

sued to obtain freedom for himself and his wife and two daughters on the grounds that they had lived for a while in areas where slavery was illegal. When the legal battle eventually rose to the level of the U.S. Supreme Court, the justices rendered the decision that since slaves were private property, the federal government could not declare slaves freed simply on the basis of their having lived at some point in a free state or territory (Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory in this case), and that furthermore, any person descended from Africans, whether slave or free, was not a citizen of the United States, so that Scott had no right to sue in federal court. This decision, issued by the Supreme Court on March 6, 1857 helped catalyze public outrage over the institution of slavery during the four years which followed, culminating in the outbreak of the great Civil War in 1861.

Dred Scott had died in St. Louis in 1858, and was buried in an unmarked grave. Fr. Dowling used his skills as a genealogist to locate the gravesite in Calvary Cemetery, whose trees and green lawns, dotted with tombstones, began just three streets south of his childhood home in the suburb of Baden on the north side of St. Louis. There is a wonderful photograph of him standing with Scott's great-grandson John A. Madison on March 6, 1957, with Dowling pointing with his cane to the section of grass where the former slave was buried and announcing their plans: "We have in mind putting up only a simple monument. Then if someone someday wants to put up a better monument it will at least be known where Dred Scott lies." A descendant of the white family which had originally owned Scott carried out Fr. Dowling's wishes and paid for a gravestone. For a long time afterward, people who visited the gravesite would leave Lincoln head pennies on top of the stone, to honor both Scott and Lincoln.<sup>10</sup>



Father Ed Dowling standing with Dred Scott's great-grandson John A. Madison on March 6, 1957, one hundred years after the famous Supreme Court decision which started the Civil War, with Dowling pointing with his cane to the section of grass where the former slave was buried and announcing his plans to erect a memorial to Scott's bravery in making his stand for freedom.

***Links with other groups: Valdosta.*** In the letter he wrote Bobbie Burger at the Alcoholic Foundation on September 1945, Howard W. from the St. Louis black A.A. group wrote Bobbie Burger at the Alcoholic Foundation, and told her "We will be glad to correspond with the colored group that is being organized at Valdosta, Georgia."

That date would make this Georgia group one of the very early black A.A. groups, although not one of the first three formed. Valdosta was a town of around 18,000 at that time, located in south

Georgia almost on the Florida border, infamous for the eruption in May 1918 of white mobs who ended up lynching at least thirteen African Americans, including a black woman named Mary Turner, whose unborn eight-month old baby was cut from her womb and murdered along with her.<sup>11</sup> It is important to remember that, for the whole length of the twentieth century, the experience of walking into a large group of white people, where you were the only African-American present, could be inherently frightening and unnerving for most American blacks.

***Links with other groups: Washington, D.C.*** In October 1945, Bobbie Burger wrote to Torrence S. (the secretary of the black A.A. group in St. Louis) and said “we have heard of another Negro Group started in Washington, D.C. earlier this year . . . . Would you care to correspond with them and share experience?”<sup>12</sup>

As a side note: either Torrence failed to write the people in Washington, D.C., or they failed to write him, or they failed to understand that the St. Louis black A.A. group had actually been started three months before their group, because the founder of the black A.A. group in Washington, a black physician named Dr. Jim Scott, M.D., later went around claiming that the group he established there in April 1945, was the first black A.A. group. This is not to take credit from Dr. Scott, who was a marvelous man who did heroic work in Washington, D.C.

***Bill Wilson’s lack of success in New York City:*** The earliest experiments with trying to bring black people into A.A. in New York City unfortunately did not work. Bill Wilson wrote to Joe D. on October 22, 1943,<sup>13</sup> and spoke with regret of the “stark fact” that “whites refuse to mingle with blacks socially.” “Nor can they be coerced or persuaded to do so, even alcoholics! I know, because



I once tried here in New York and got so much slapped down that I realized no amount of insistence would do any good.”<sup>14</sup>

***But St. Louis showed that a black A.A. group would work:*** So the St. Louis group was the first black A.A. group, followed by Chicago (see the next section), then Washington, D.C. (in third place), and then apparently a group in Valdosta, Georgia not long afterwards, if this Georgia A.A. group survived — we wish we knew more about its history.



## **PART II**

# **The Chicago Axis**

**Chicago – Gary – South Bend  
March 20, 1945**



## CHAPTER 2

### **The Chicago Axis: Riding on the South Shore Line**

Some of the earliest black A.A. groups in the United States were formed between 1945 and 1948 along an axis running from Chicago eastward through Gary and Michigan City to South Bend, Indiana. These four cities are linked by an interurban rail line called the South Shore Railroad which made it easy for black A.A. members to travel back and forth and come to one another's aid.

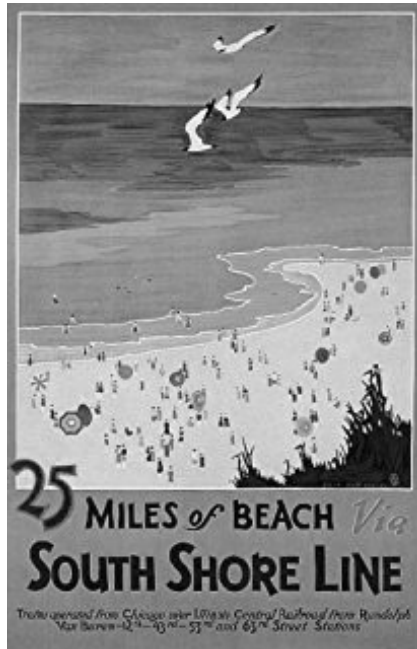


A photo from 1946 showing the South Shore interurban train stopping to pick up passengers in Michigan City.

And in fact, the black A.A. leaders in these cities continued to remain in close and constant contact with one another for at least sixty years after the first black Chicago A.A. group was formed.

We know much more at present about early black A.A. in this area than we do about any other part of the United States.

The Chicago South Shore & South Bend line starts in downtown Chicago in the Chicago Loop, and extends to the east along the southern coast of Lake Michigan through Gary and Michigan City, and then continues eastwards away from the lake to South Bend. In those days, Gary and South Bend were both heavily industrialized cities, where Gary had huge steel mills, and South Bend was home to the Studebaker automobile factory, the Singer Sewing Machine factory, the Bendix factory, and the South Bend Lathe Works.



## **The second black A.A. group in the United States was formed in Chicago on March 20, 1945**

Around two months or so after the founding of the first black A.A. group in St. Louis, the second black A.A. group was formed in Chicago on March 20, 1945.<sup>15</sup> This was the famous Evans Avenue Group, which is still active and going strong in Chicago today.

Evans Avenue, where it was originally located, runs north and south from 43rd Street to 83rd Street, parallel to and one block west of Cottage Grove Avenue. The group still meets — Raymond Irving took Frank Nyikos and me to visit their present clubhouse, which is now at 319 E. 75th Street, but they still call it the Evans Avenue Group. The clubhouse has a large number of photos and memorabilia from the days of early black A.A. in Chicago, which would be helpful in writing a fuller history of the early days of black A.A. in Chicago.

The Evans Avenue group was started by a man named Earl Redmond, who was eventually joined by other black alcoholics (including Bill Williams the Tailor, the fourth African American to get sober in the Evans Avenue Group), who, working together, established an enduring center for black A.A. in Chicago.

There is a traditional document where the group describes its founding and early years. I can think of no better way to tell this story than to simply transcribe this document verbatim:<sup>16</sup>

### **History of the Evans Avenue Group**

The late Earl Redmond had been to a sanitarium for alcoholics approximately six times for “the cure.” The last visit his cure only lasted from 10:00 a.m. Saturday morning until noon. When he came back “uncured,” management felt he was giving the place a bad name. They called A.A. for Earl on Saturday, March 19, 1945. 1st meeting – March 20, 1945 – 12th step call made on the late Earl Redmond by the

late Fred Forhan and the late Norm Robertson. First meeting was held at Earl's home, which at that time was on Evans Avenue – that's how the group got its name.

The group met at homes of one another for about one and one half years. At the end of the first year, the membership had increased to nine members. Meetings were held each week on a regular basis at members' houses.

March 1946, the first anniversary dinner was held at the Old Hull House, 18 people present: the nine Evans Avenue members and nine from other groups. The speaker was the late Judge John Touhy. In late 1946, the first meeting outside the homes was held at Friendship House, 43rd and Indiana Avenue. The group met at Friendship House for about three months, then moved to Parkway Community House, 51st and South Parkway (now known as King Drive). They met once a week on Wednesday nights.

The first split occurred in 1948 – thirty-two members by that time. It was a discussion group and not always enough time for each member to comment. Sixteen members stayed at Parkway Community House (Wednesday Night Group) and sixteen members moved to Ida B. Wells Community House, 436 East 39th Street (the Thursday Night Group).

In 1950 the first open meeting was held on Thursday night at Ida B. Wells Community House. The speakers for the meeting were Chan and Marie F. The tradition of holding an Open meeting on the last Thursday of each month began and continued until the Tuesday night sectional meetings began.

In 1950 one of the members moved to the West Side of Chicago and the expansion of the Evans Avenue groups continued. They met at the house of the late Joe Diggles at Hull House. Joe lived and worked there at that time.

A few meetings were held at the Hull House, then the group began meeting at Robert Brooks Field House on Monday nights. They met there for quite a while, then



moved to the Gold Dome in Garfield Park were the group still meets.

In August 1954, Evans Avenue Group began meeting at 825 East 50th Street. There were four meetings: Thursday and Friday night, Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon. The original Wednesday night group which met at Holy Cross Church, 65th and Maryland Avenue, later moved to St. Sabina Church, 78th and Racine, where it continues to meet on Wednesday night.

There was also a night workers meeting held Saturday morning at Corpus Christi Church, 48th and King Drive. This group was established before the other group moved to 825 East 50th Street. In 1954, the 825 Club was formed. The purpose of the club was to provide and maintain a place for meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The membership of the 825 Club was open to any member of A.A. The members of the 825 Club had a dream and a goal of someday owning their own building.

In 1961 the meeting place moved from 825 East 50th Street to 7624 South Cottage Grove with several meetings being held during the week.

In October 1974, the dream and goal of the 825 Club was reached when the club bought a building at 319 East 75th Street. The dream and vision of faithful members had become a reality.

There are 23 Alcoholics Anonymous meetings held at the club weekly. One Al-Anon and one Alateen meeting. There are six AA meetings held outside the club.

In 1977 another dream came true – the Evans Avenue/825 Club held its Mortgage Burning Ceremony!

This building at 319 East 75th Street which they bought in 1974, is the place in Chicago where a large number of black A.A. groups still meet today.



## CHAPTER 3

### **Bill Williams the Tailor: Chicago Black A.A. No. 4, Early Life**

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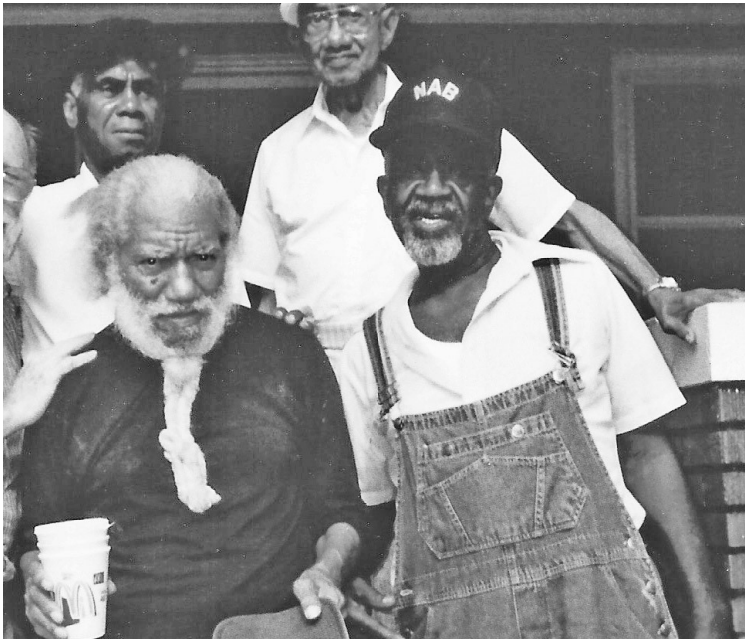
Editor's note: Bill Williams (born 1904, sober in December 1945 at the age of 41, died on May 15, 2003 when he was around 99 years old) — the text of the lead he gave at the Kentucky State A.A. Convention held in Owensboro, Kentucky in 1982, when he was 78 years old. This recording was discovered and transcribed by Frank Nyikos, Archivist for Northern Indiana A.A. Area 22.

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Thank you very much. Will all of you join me in a few moments of silent prayer, that we may pray for this nation and all nations (the leaders especially), that we may pray for the suffering alcoholics all over this land and country. That we may pray that whenever one asks for help that our hands will be there. Will we pray for those that came a distance here to this convention, that they may go back home, have a safe journey back home — and especially, pray for me. Thank you.

I am Bill Williams from Texas through Chicago. *[Laughter]* There was quite a confusion here a few years ago about that Bill W. because when our great founder, co-founder of this wonderful fellowship and society (which he so liked to call it) passed, then

one Sunday when I went to our club, they had a note — no, one Wednesday, Thursday one — when I went to the club they had a sign up there that we’re going to have a memorial service for Bill W. this Sunday. *[Laughter]* And I told ’em “you’re a little premature yet, this is Bill Williams and he’s still around, and he’s gonna live to get to 110, so you got a long time to wait to have a memorial service for me.” *[Laughter]*



Bill Williams the Tailor is the tall man with glasses at the center back, while Raymond Irving is the short man standing next to him on the left. Jimmy Hodges (a famous second-generation Chicago black A.A. leader) is on the front left holding a coffee cup, while Charles B. (who drove Bill Williams and Jimmy Hodges to South Bend) is the man with overalls on the front right. This photo was taken in 1999, at the home of Jimmy Miller, the First Lady of Black A.A.

## **Everything is bigger in Texas**

So, now you know this is Bill Williams, so you don't have to get confused about which Bill it is: from Texas through Chicago (which is a long ways to Owensboro from Texas) — cotton fields of Texas, where everything is bigger and better. *[Laughter]* Can you hear me back there? Thank you. I may not say anything, but I want you to hear what I'm saying. *[Laughter]*

You know, everything is bigger in Texas and coupla' guys was arguing one day and the guy was talkin' and boastin' (and you're not boastin' in Texas you know, we just tell the truth, that's all) and, uh, he was talkin' about he knew a guy that was so rich in Texas until he flew his own airplane, so a guy from New York said "that isn't anything, we have a lotta people up there that fly their own airplane." He said "but in their house?" *[Laughter]* And another' was talkin', was talkin' with an individual and he was amazed that he didn't drive a Cadillac, he drove a Volkswagen and he asked him, says "is it air conditioned?" He says "oh no, but I keep a couple of 'em in the frigidaire occasionally." *[Laughter]* So we do things in a big way in Texas.

## **He was a periodic drinker**

I could go over a long list of the things that tell you that my life was unmanageable, and I want to attempt to go to (at least I don't think I will, I never know what I'm gonna do, and I was right, I never know what I'm goin' say when I get up here). Uh, cause I never knew when I was goin' to drink. I was strictly a periodic and I never knew when I was gonna start, and once I got started, I never knew when I was gonna stop. I used to go on those drunks and I'd stay from two days to two weeks, you know, and when I

got off I stay off all the way from two weeks to six months, so my token just about like that too. *[Laughter]*

### **The story of the drunk in the wrong house**

But, uh, I'll tell you a little story about the town drunk in my little home town of Longview, Texas. And, uh, they had what you call little shotgun houses, and there was about half a dozen of them in a row, and the town drunk lived in the last one down the line there. But you know, in Texas, we don't lock doors down there, we didn't then you know, you just go in. And everything was big and this guy unfortunately would always go in the wrong house at night, 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, it was very embarrassing to the people and his wife. It didn't bother him at all, so his wife decided, what I will do, I will get a lantern and, and get me a red bulb to put around it and put it in front of his door and so maybe he'll find this house.

So, that night, that day he really put on one and he was comin' home about 11 o'clock that night and he staggered up there and he looked at the street light up there, and he could see that sign and he smiled with an all-satisfaction. He says "Yes, I know this is the right street because I can see it, 'cause I can see that lantern in front of my door down there — it's gotta be the right place."

And he staggered on down there and walked on in, and we didn't have electric lights, we have what we call coal oil lamps, you call it kerosene now, and we didn't have these li'l bitty book matches like that, we had long matches on a stick. And so, he fumbled around in his pocket and found one of those and he struck one up there and he looked 'round over the room and he looked over there and he smiled, he was really happy, says "I know I'm in the right place, cause there's my two children layin' over there in

the bed.” And that match went out, you know, and so he fumbled round and found another one, he struck that one up and he looked ’round over here and he was really happy then, and he says “Yes, I know I’m in the right house, because there’s my wife over there in the bed.” And he said, “This gotta be the right place, because there I am in the bed with her.” *[Laughter]* But, he said, “The confusin’ thing to me is, who the hell is this standin’ here?” *[Laughter]*

### **Bill’s first drink at the age of fifteen**

And that was just about how confused I was when A.A. found me, I didn’t find A.A. I don’t want to have to stoop over, it’s enough problem bein’ up here. *[Laughter]* I, uh as I says, I didn’t find A.A., I ain’t never heard of Alcoholics Anonymous. I don’t know as I’d ever heard the word, but I’m pretty sure I hadn’t, I ain’t never heard the word alcoholic.

Because what they called me from Texas to in Chicago wasn’t that nice a word. They just didn’t call me anything like that and I don’t think I’d ever heard the word alcoholic and I won’t say the things, the names that they called me, and they called me that so long until I began to believe it and I thought that’s what I was. Because words mean a lot, you can say somethin’ to somebody long enough and they’ll believe it, even they know you’re lyin’, just keep sayin’ it and even you’ll believe it, say it long enough.

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Editor’s note: Bill had his first drink, he told us, in September 1919 when he was fifteen years old and living in Longview, Texas. This is a town in east Texas, located almost on the Louisiana border, only 65 miles from Shreveport. In those days the state of Texas grew more cotton than any other state in the U.S., and east Texas was

very much part of the deep south, where vast numbers of black slaves had worked the cotton fields back before the Civil War. In the 1920 census, Longview had a population of 5,713. In our most recent U.S. census, it was still 23% black.

Bill Williams failed to mention the race riot which took place in Longview in the summer of 1919, just two months before he took his first drink. In fact, many people in the black community in Longview, Texas had to have been deeply traumatized by those violent events, in a way quite similar to what often happened with Vietnam war veterans and veterans of the warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan. See Rebecca Onion, "Red Summer: In 1919, white Americans visited awful violence on black Americans. So black Americans decided to fight back," *Slate* (March 2015).<sup>17</sup>

"In Longview, Texas, in July 1919, S. L. Jones, who was a teacher and a local distributor of the black newspaper the *Chicago Defender*, investigated the suspicious death of Lemuel Walters. Walters was a black man who was accused of raping a white woman, jailed, and ultimately found dead under 'mysterious' circumstances. When the *Defender* published a story about Walters' death, asserting that the alleged rape had been a love affair and Walters' death the result of a lynching, Jones came under attack, beaten by the woman's brothers.

"Hearing a rumor that Jones was in trouble, Dr. C. P. Davis, a black physician and friend of the teacher, tried to get law enforcement to protect him from further violence. When it became clear that this help was not forthcoming, Davis organized two-dozen black volunteers to guard Jones' house. That same night, a mob surrounded the dwelling. Four armed white men knocked on the door, then tried to ram it down. The black defenders, who were arranged around Jones' property, opened fire. A half-hour gun battle ensued, in which several attackers were wounded; the posse retreated.



“Hearing the town’s fire bell ringing to summon reinforcements, Jones and Davis went into hiding, knowing that they wouldn’t be able to defend themselves against a larger mob. Davis borrowed a soldier’s uniform, put it on, and took the first of several trains out of the area. At one point, he asked a group of black soldiers he found in a train car to conceal him in their ranks, which they did, contributing to his disguise by giving him an overseas cap and a gas mask. Later that day, Jones also managed to escape. But their successful resistance and flight were bittersweet victories: Before the episode was over, Davis’ and Jones’ homes were burned, along with Davis’ medical practice and the meeting place of the town’s Negro Business Men’s League. Davis’ father-in-law was killed in the violence.”

Around the same time (July and August of 1919) there was also a race riot in Chicago, where Bill Williams was going to eventually end up. When a white mob attacked (armed with bricks) black Chicagoans came out on the streets in large numbers to defend themselves.

It is important to remember, when we are talking about the formation of the earliest black A.A. groups, that there had been blood on American streets for all these people’s lifetimes, as white people and black people had fought one another over and over again. We are not talking about just a simple hostility and dislike — if only it were so easy — but anger and rage which could quickly turn violently murderous. How could the A.A. program get black and white alcoholics sitting across the table from one another and sharing their most private fears and humiliations? Or at least tolerating the existence within the fellowship of both black A.A. groups and white A.A. groups?

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A white mob with bricks getting ready to attack black people during the Chicago race riot of July and August 1919



In response to those white mobs, black people in Chicago gathering in their own self-defense

So uh, I'd drink myself, I started at a very early age of fifteen — was my first drink — I can remember it even if it was this morning, cause anything happened twenty minutes ago I've forgotten in general. But uh, I have heard people talk and I have tried to find some excuses for me bein' an alcoholic. I always need a fall guy, I try to have somebody. I have a little tailor shop and if something wrong, I always blame it on the girl or the presser or the cleaner, somebody, it's never my fault. And I have tried to go back over my life and tried to figure out why am I an alcoholic, what happened in my family. But I couldn't find anything. Uh, nobody drank in my home, we never even around Christmas, you know — when everybody has license to drink, around Christmas, holidays. But, we didn't even drink then, the people — we just — it just wasn't the thing to do. Never had friends over or nothin'.

I had never seen alcohol in my house at all until — and I shall never forget it, it's something that's endeavored. I remember my first drink and I remember the last one — I don't remember all the stuff between — but my first drink was September, the second Sunday in September 1919. So, you needn't bother about trying to figure out my age, this guy must be old, well I am. I'm a senior citizen in everything I been into. *[Laughter]* You don't have to, everything I belong to, I been in there a long time — everything.

But uh, we in Texas there, in this place we used to have, and I guess we still do, what's called revival meetings, but they called it something else then. Anyway, we're way out in the country. Most of you have heard of a little place Kilgore, Texas, where the Rangerettes is from.<sup>18</sup> Well, this place where I was goin' was a little on the other side of there and so my father had bought me a T-model Ford. So I carried a group of people out there to this revival meeting, and you go and you stay all day. Well, our

mechanic had a big old long car — 'bout half as long as this building almost seemingly at that time — and he had a load and I had a load and you stay all day.

### **Drinking hard cider and throwing up**

Well, that day after we got there he bought — we have in, we still have in Texas something you call a commissary — you name it and we got it, anything you want, you got it in that commissary. So this guy bought some apple cider and he decided that we would drink it, and we did. But the “we” didn’t get drunk, hell, *I got drunk*. [Laughter]

Well, I had never drank alcohol, so my stomach — somebody talkin’ last night about their stomach didn’t want something you know, I think olive[s], and it, if you keep on tryin’, it’ll accept it. Well, mine didn’t reject all right off away, it accepted that, and it taste good and kinda sweet, but I didn’t like it. And of course, later on that day, it was in September and it was hot in Texas and you done your usual things after your stomach held it for a little while — it came back. And uh, I laid out there in my T-model Ford and by 8 or 9 o’clock that night, why I was able to drive it back another 30 miles home and bring the people.

### **Losing the power of choice**

Well, I know now at that particular time I’d lost something. That very day — that Sunday — I’d lost something. Prior to that, I had a choice of what I drank. I could drink soda pop, water, milk or what have you. But once I drank that alcohol, the second Sunday in September 1919, from that point on for the next years, I had no choice. I had to drink whether I wanted to or not. And you

know, since I been sober, I knew evidently that *I had to drink it* because I never liked the taste of alcohol. I even [knew], from that point on, that I didn't like [anything about it] but what it done to me. I didn't like the way it made me feel, I didn't like nothin' about it. Alcohol. But I drank it for twenty-six years.

### **He owned several funeral homes but lost them through drinking**

Now, a number of things happened to me in those twenty-six years of drinkin', some of it wasn't too bad because uh, you know, I was young and I could get drunk tonight and work tomorrow and sober up and drink the next night. But that went on and on and on until it began [to get] worse. I was a tailor by trade. My father was an undertaker and when he passed, the undertakin' shop went over to me and of course, I worked with it, but with that drinkin', you just can't continue to stay in business. You can't make enough money to stay in business when you drinkin'. I got disgusted with it and I drank up four funeral homes. *[Laughter]* I went in and out of business four different times. There! I drank up two homes. My father gave me a house and a lot, then he left the family home there for me. I got on a drunk, and I gave the house and lot away that he gave me and I got on another drunk and I spent all my money and I wrote my sisters and brothers and told them that I was in dire need and they signed a quit claim deed and I pawned it and I never did get it out, I drank it up too.

### **Running off with his lodge's money**

But, I could go on with a number of things that drank me up, but the thing that drank me away from Texas was this. I was the

treasurer of my lodge [*Laughter*]. Somethin' familiar about that? And on around September, why they collect all the annual relief that goes in, and my wife was in Chicago — Chicago's a place I never even wanted to visit [*Laughter*] and I, I, I never wanted to visit. I had two brothers lived there and I never come to see them. But my wife was in Chicago at that particular time visiting them and uh, so we collected this relief and after the meeting was over, the Worshipful Master asked uh, "We'll go and have a little drink." You know, he shouldn't 've done that. [*Laughter*] And we had a little drink. A little drink does not — they say everybody says "a little drink won't hurt you," that's correct, it won't. But who, where, is the alcoholic that want a *little* drink? So anyway, we had a little drink and he went on home. My wife isn't home or anything, course it wouldn't make much difference I don't guess, if you'd been there, because once I started to drinking I always had to be someplace else. I was never satisfied no place. I had to be somewhere else all the time. And uh, with her bein' out of town, why that helped, you know. So, I continued to drink.

### **Traveling to Shreveport and Greenville**

And the next day, I decided that I wanted to go to Shreveport, Louisiana. I had some friends there and I had just bought a car and paid one down payment on it and I happened to remember that if you take a car across . . . a state line and haven't paid for it, you could be in trouble. So some of my marbles was still even workin' then. So I parked the car on the side of the street and put the key up in the sun visor there and I went on . . . to Shreveport and called up the owner and told him where the car was. I didn't know I wasn't comin' back, but something must 've told me that I wasn't comin' back. [*Laughter*]

I stayed in Shreveport for two or three days and the guy that I ran up with, and we were drinkin' there, he liked to fight and I liked to play, so he started a fight and got put in jail. So I stayed there long enough to get him out of jail, and I decided [just on a whim, to go on over to Greenville, Mississippi]. And right then and there I should have known that I was an alcoholic.

I had been in school with a guy from Greenville, Mississippi. And I left Shreveport, left Texas and went to Greenville, Mississippi. So you know I had to be an alcoholic to go to Greenville, Mississippi. And that's a dry state too, but you know, something happened. I found alcohol as soon as I got there. They had a little place they called the Bird Cage and I found it. And I stayed there for a couple of days and I decided that I wasn't goin' back to Texas. Well you know, I didn't have that relief money, you know, and those people's money. They just wasn't safe, even though we were brothers — it just wasn't safe to go back there, I didn't think, without their money, and I didn't have it.

### **Becoming a tailor in Memphis, Tennessee**

And I read in the paper where they wanted a tailor and a presser in Memphis, Tennessee, and I went on to Memphis, Tennessee and started to work. My wife came home. She didn't know where I was and she got sick. And I called her up and told her where I was and to come to Memphis. And she came to Memphis, but she didn't like Memphis and we stayed there for three months.

I said, 'Well, where we going? I'm not going back to Texas, not now.' Even though the, you know, but the money had been paid, because I was in business with another guy and I had a very good business there. Makin' a lot of money. And uh, of course, he paid

the, you know, the money all I had taken. But, you know, you just can't face . . . go back right then. It's something won't let you.

### **Moving to Chicago to stay, and opening a tailor shop there**

So she says "I kinda like Chicago." Well, I had no choice. She didn't want to stay there, even though I didn't wanna [leave], so I came to Chicago! Back in 1936, and things were tough in Chicago. People were carrying salt and pepper in their pockets in '36 and '37, and they'd cut your finger off and eat it. *[Laughter]* And I couldn't find no job [at first], but fortunately *[laughter]*, fortunately I was [finally] able to get a job. And I stayed and I worked.

But I kept drinkin' and I finally opened me up a little tailor shop and I kept on drinkin'. And finally the World War II came on and I started to makin' a lot of money. I was makin' more money than I could drink up and spend, so I was giving the other to my wife. *[Laughter]* And bein' of course, in being a periodic I would go five and six months without a drink, and I didn't think I was gonna drink anymore and my wife didn't either. So everything was fine at home and I — but I knew I couldn't stop when I got ready [for another binge], so I put all the money in the bank in her name, and I wrote checks, but she had to sign them. And I didn't mind that, because I didn't want to be a complete bum.

And I knew that [I would just spend it all foolishly, especially if I was on a binge]. Because I'm a complete fool with money, you know, and I knew that, and I was worse when I drank. I'm still crazy with money now, you know, I don't have no regulations, you know, no, no nothin'. As long as I've got it, it goes. I never ask what anything costs until after I get it — just give me that if I like it, and I pay it.



### **The doctor's opinion: a hopeless alcoholic**

Er uh, so I, I got this little tailor shop and started to working there, and I continued to drink and I was just about to drink that up. And I'd went to my doctor, I knew I had a problem, and the doctor told me, he says, "son, if there were any medicine to stop you from drinkin' I would give it to you, I wouldn't sell it to you." And I knew then if I went to Dr. Davis (and that was my doctor's name and he was my doctor in Texas) if he didn't have the answer, nobody didn't. So I just felt then that I was gonna drink myself to death, and had gotten to the place that I would be hopin' it'd be soon, cause I didn't like what was happening to me. I didn't like what was happening to my wife, I didn't like what was happening no place in the neighborhood.

Cause I'd go on those drunks and I'd . . . I just wasn't to be found. I wouldn't go home, I wouldn't do nothin', and naturally you know, I, you know, you didn't bathe and you wouldn't eat because no respectable alcoholic will take a bath or eat to spoil a good drunk. *[Laughter]* So I, I didn't do none of those things.

And finally, I had bought a house and paid for it while I was drinkin' [but only] because I gave my wife all the money [and she always used it sensibly].

'Cause when I'd go on a drunk, the only money that I would have was what I could pawn my clothes for and my watch — I'd always keep my watch and my ring because I could get that any time of night you know, and borrry. Cause I couldn't get no money out of the bank, I'd tried that once. I tried to forge a check once you know, but uh, I got away with it once, but that next time, I think I was a little too drunk. *[Laughter]* And when I signed her name you know, the guy looked at me and he didn't said nothin'

you know, because he walked in the back, and I don't know how he got hold of my wife that quick. In a few minutes she walked in. And I went on home with her. *[Laughter]* Well, naturally, that's the thing to do, what else is it? You know, you don't want to go to jail. I was just trying to forge a check, you know, I can't afford that.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Bill Williams the Tailor: Discovering A.A. in Chicago**

And uh, but I, I kept on drinkin' and finally, it was a man roomin' with us and I had never heard of Alcoholics Anonymous. There was a man roomin' with us that read about A.A., Alcoholics Anonymous, in a magazine. And he showed it to my wife. And she looked at it, I don't know, you all, she said "Well, maybe we oughta write 'em, they might can help." And then she — 'cause all of her marbles was there, she wasn't like me, she was all there — [she said], "If it's any good, Chicago being the second largest city, it's gotta be in Chicago."

And she looked in the telephone directory and she found it. And she called them, and "Sure, we can help you."

And she said "It's not me, it's my husband."

They says "Well, he'll have to call."

She says "Oh, oh," says "that guy won't call." Says "Isn't it anything that you can do?"

And they said, "Well," said "we can send you what was known as the beginners kit, some literature, and maybe he'll read that and it might say something to him."

And they sent that. And one of the pamphlets, "So You Can't Stop Drinking" by Elder Brown, I'm sure you have that.<sup>19</sup> The

other one, they don't make it anymore, it had two big A's on it. She never said a word to me when she got it, she just laid it on the dresser.

And I saw it, but I wouldn't read it, because I wouldn't figure there'd be nothin' in reading that would help me. You know, because she had tried to get me to go to unit and to make pledges and that. Well, I wadn't gone make no pledges because I would know I'd break it. So I wouldn't do that and I wouldn't read . . . . and I wouldn't read none of those things although I was a Sunday school student and I was in Sunday school every Sunday (and still is there every Sunday) except when I was drunk. *[Laughter]*

### **His last drunk**

And being a periodic, you know, it is only maybe two or three times a year when I'd pull those drunks, you know. So, I was there, but I wouldn't read that, so, on my last drunk — and sometimes somebody told me, once said "How did you know that was your last drunk?" Well, see when I came to Alcoholics Anonymous they gave me a choice and I can stay sober long as I want to. And today, I choose to stay sober.

So, on my last drunk, uh, I had been gone for two weeks, I had been drinkin' for two weeks. I looked a heckava lot worse than I do now *[laughter]* because I didn't eat and I didn't bathe as I said. The only type of cleanliness that I would do would shave and put on a clean white shirt. Nothin' else, and oh yeah, I would get a manicure and I haven't had one since. *[Laughter]* I think I need one, but I'll get around to that one day too.

But I'd always, ninety percent of the time when I was on one of them drunks, I'd get a manicure. I don't know why. *[Laughter]* But I think usually it's, well, all ladies are beautiful, just some look

a little better than others, and usually there's always pretty girls that's doin' it too. I think usually I just always wanted to look at them. *[Laughter]* That's probably what it was, but I don't know. Anyway.

But on this last drunk, my wife was on her way to the doctor and usually, see, if I'd leave home with my car, I didn't go back to it. But if I'd leave home without my car, I didn't go back to get it on the drunk. So, this particular time I left home without my car, so I didn't have it and I was walkin' on my way to get another drink. I was strictly a bottle drinker. And you never saw me, you would never see me, without a bottle in my possession unless I just drink it and threw one away on the way for another, cause I couldn't afford to wait till somebody else decide to . . . buy a drink. I couldn't afford to wait for that.

So I was on my way after another drink and she saw somebody cross the street, and she said, "That's gotta be Bill because nobody walks that fast but him." And she ran and caught me and laid her hand on my shoulder and says, "Bill," says "why on earth don't you stop drinkin'?" And I came up with a "but . . . ee, but . . . ah," and I says, "Baby, why don't you help me?" And she looked up at me and says, "How in the hell can I help you when you won't stay at home?"

And I went home with her that night and she didn't go to the doctor. She finally was able to pull me into a bathtub, and get me to take a bath with her help, and then I got in bed. I didn't sleep well when I drank, so I was, I was always run down. I was sick. I never stopped drinkin' until I got too sick to stop drinkin', I mean too sick to drink it. I never got, I never stopped drinkin' because I got broke, cause no respectable alcoholic will stop drinkin' because he gets broke.

### **Reading the A.A. pamphlets**

And so I never did, but that time I went home and uh, the next morning when I woke up, those two pamphlets were layin' in a chair by my bed plus my glasses, cause she knew I wouldn't be able to see it if I didn't have these, my cheaters. And she was out and gone to this little shop trying to keep it open until I come back. And I picked up those pamphlets and began to read them. And I read both of them with its entirety and I said within myself these people act exactly like I do.

I says "I think I'll go down there and see if they can tell me what I want to know, show me how to drink controlled, and that's what I wanted to do." Even though I didn't like it, I didn't want to stop drinkin', but I didn't want to get drunk. I wanted to drink liquor and not get drunk. And that's a pretty neat trick. I haven't found it yet. *[Laughter]*

### **Going to the A.A. office in downtown Chicago**

So, I got up and put my clothes on and caught the street car and went downtown to that office, but I was in such a bad shape till I had to stop on the way down there and get me a pint of liquor to be able to stay *on* the streetcar. I just couldn't stay on there. And I took a drink. Well, I knew I wasn't gonna get drunk then, I knew I was comin' back home. Any other time (you know) starting, then I knew I wouldn't, but I knew then I was. This was a matter of necessity. I had to have that to stay.

So I went on downtown to the office and it was one guy just ahead of me and he went in and I heard the lady said to him,

“Sorry, mister, there’s nothin’ we can do for you.” Well you know, sometime we judge people by their dress or what have you or somethin’ like that, and I looked myself over, and I remembered what he looked like, the guy was cleaned up and dressed and he didn’t look any worse than I did, and if we were both there for the same thing, if they couldn’t help him, they couldn’t help me.

So I got nervous all over again and I had to go out in the washroom and take me another drink to be able to stay there so the lady could tell me that same thing, which I didn’t believe that she could. Cause nobody could tell the guy that had the greatest gift that God have given to humanity, nobody could tell me that. Nothin’ you could do for me! But, anyway, I stayed there anyway. I got this drink.

In a few minutes she called me in and asked me a few questions, I don’t know what, other than my name, address. She asked me one question and I lied, I know that. She asked me if I wanted to stop drinkin’ and I said yes. And I know I didn’t wanna stop drinkin’ but I figured that was the only way to be able to get in there to get what I wanted. So I said yes. They says, “O.K., you go on back home, somebody’ll be out to see you.”

Well you know, that I didn’t believe, because if that had been in Texas I would have believed that, but I had been in Chicago long [enough] to know that, what you get without any money wasn’t worth very much, and they didn’t ask me for any money. So I knew wouldn’t nobody would be out. Why should they come out there, you know? And nevertheless I went on back home and got back into bed cause I was in really bad shape. And this is on a Saturday night.

### **Two A.A. members made a twelfth-step call on him at home**

And you know, to my surprise two guys came to see me that night, that I didn't believe was going to happen, and they talked with me and they talked to me. And they told me about Alcoholics Anonymous and told me all about it and how it worked and all of that. Wasn't impressed at all. It just wasn't sayin' nothin' to me. Well, all that talk, they was nice guys. But the only thing that said anything to me was one of the guys says this, says "Alcoholism is a progressive, incurable disease, and if you wanna do anything about your drinkin', it's total abstinence, or keep on drinkin' till you get ready to quit."

Well I virtually tuned them out at that point, they kept talkin' and I remembered when I took my first drink and I brought myself up and I tried, I was in bad shape but I could think of that. I brought myself up like in five year intervals and see how much worse I was after five years, and after the next five and on up to now. Well, I couldn't stand me now. Well, what'll I do if I'm gonna get worse than I am? So then I was willing to accept this program because I didn't want to get worse, not because I wanted to stop drinking.

But then, I knew it wasn't gonna work. The reason that I knew it wadn't gonna work, [was] because before they left, they told me about some meetings. Say "We have to make meetings, we make meetings." And of course at that time, we only had one meeting a week, and that was on a Wednesday night, and we were meeting at their homes. So this is Saturday night and we're at meetings.

You know, have you ever been set so close and yet so far? Have you ever driven out where they, those mountains are, and you look like you see a mountain over there and it looks like it's about a



hundred yards, but you can drive an hour and a half and you still didn't get to it. Well, that's the way that seemed. I thought I had something at first, but now I know I don't. But nevertheless I had no choice, because I didn't have anything else.

So when they left, both of them gave me their telephone number and said, "Give us a ring tomorrow." So that Sunday morning, when I got up a little later on, I called them and I let the telephone ring. I didn't want to talk with them, I didn't want to talk to the guys. So, I let the telephone ring once and I hung up. I says I knew the guy wouldn't be there. *[Laughter]* So, I done the same thing with the other guy, it rang once and I hung up. I didn't, I didn't want to talk with them. I said, "Knew he wouldn't gone be at home!" But I set around the house all that day Sunday, wondering, the only thing that was in my mind — how long before I'm going to be drunk again?

**But Bill couldn't stand to have  
somebody else tell him what to do**

Cause I knew this program wasn't gonna work, because I had pictured how the meetings was gonna be. I pictured that we was gonna be sitting there with a bunch of drunks in a circle and there'd be some guy sittin', standin' up there givin' me the old one-two and I figured he'd be weighin' around 225 — I don't know how I came to that figure — and tellin' me what I had to do if I wanted to stay sober.

And I knew if somebody told me something like that, I was gonna leave that one night and get drunk. Because see, I had never worked on a job long enough to get a vacation, because bosses I'd always worked for told me, never asked me anything, they told me what to do. And I couldn't stand to be told, cause the only time anybody ever told me something, and I did it without any talk

back, was my father and he'd been dead since 1924! So I don't do, I didn't do things that people told me.

So, I knew that it wasn't gonna work, but I had no choice. So that Monday morning, usually it took me about two weeks to get over a drunk, but then Monday morning I was able to go to work, I was able to eat, my stomach wasn't sore anymore. I don't know why, but it wasn't. I was all there with the exception of one thing: I was sick in the head. And I was miserable that Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, wondering how long before I'm gone be drunk again.

**But he went to his first A.A. meeting, and  
nobody told him he HAD to do anything at all**

And then I made that last thing, that Wednesday night there was a meeting. It was six guys — in fact there was eight of us at that meeting. It was six guys there, I remember the group, and [in addition to them] I was there at the age of 41, and there was a kid there [who was] but the age of 21 at that meeting. Nobody told me nothing that I had to do. They told me what they did. I didn't have to come back if I didn't want to, I didn't have to stay sober if I didn't want to. I didn't have to do nothin' I didn't want to do.

**The 21-year-old at the meeting who decided  
that he couldn't live without alcohol**

But this kid was askin' a lotta — and I think even still they're valid questions. You know, because we associate drinkin' fun with drinkin'. If I'm goin' out to have some fun, you know, we uses alcohol. See, the non-alcoholic drinks alcohol, but the alcoholic uses alcohol for purposes. So, if I'm goin' out for fun, I'm gonna drink. If I'm goin' to a dance tonight at 10:00, I start to drinkin' at 3:00 this afternoon, to get ready to go to the dance at 10:00 tonight.

So this kid continued to ask questions, “How am I goin’ to entertain my friends? How am I gonna have any fun, what am I gonna do without the use of alcohol?” And at the age of 41, I began to wonder how in the heck I was goin’ to be able to live *with* it? And he was wonderin’ how he was going to live *without* it! And I began to feel sorry for him instead of feeling sorry for myself. *[Laughter]*

And that told me this, and I began to think of him — see, I needed A.A. at 21, I needed it because I started at 15 and I was an alcoholic from the word go. It just got worse and it wasn’t long, but I was never able to drink with control. I was never able to say, “Come on, boys, that’s enough.” I never said that in my life. I always stayed there. But I began to think, if this chap was able to accept his program tonight like I accepted it, right then . . . I knew it wasn’t going to work, but I accepted it. If he was able to accept this program, when he got my age, how much more of himself would he have? And I was starting to feel hope, but I never did see him no more, he never did come back.

### **Learn your limitations, and stay out of temptation’s way**

So they told me, this is what we do, we make meetings regular, we don’t unnecessarily tempt ourselves, we learn our limitations, we don’t go over them. Like one guy said, anyplace he go, if he’s uncomfortable two minutes, he’s been gone one minute. So if you go someplace you’re uncomfortable — leave, you know. So it said, learn your limitations.

And when you learned that, I thought about a story I heard once about your limitations. There was two guys visit a particular tavern every night and one guy . . . every night, he’d get up and leave, but

this other guy stayed there until they threw him out. Every night, closed up the joint.

And so one particular night he asked this guy, says "Say buddy," says, "I notice you are here every night and at a certain time of night, you get up and leave — how are you able to do it? — I can't do that."

And he looked round over there, says "You see that woman sittin' over there?"

He says "Yes."

Says "Isn't that the ugliest woman you ever seen in your life?"

He says "Oh well, you know, you don't like to tell a woman is ugly, women aren't ugly, you know," but he says "She is a little homely."

He says "Homely, hell! Isn't that the ugliest woman you ever seen in your life?"

And he had to agree, "Yes, I agree with you."

He says, "Well, I sit here and drink until that woman start to lookin' pretty to me and I get up and leave." [*Laughter*]

So, it's only one tick to that with the alcoholic — you can't drink till that time. Because the first drink, she looks pretty to you, so we can't [even] take the first one.

But, we learned *our* limitations, the things that we associated, you know, associate with drinkin'. The only — there's only one thing in the world that I associate with drinkin', only one out of all the vices that they are out there, it's only one of them, and that's gamblin'. Gamblin and drinkin' is synonymous with me, and so I don't gamble. Somebody mentioned a while ago, "You bet this elevator will be there?" I wouldn't bet that, I wouldn't bet nothin', you know, because they're synonymous with me.

## CHAPTER 5

### Bill Williams the Tailor: Working the Steps

So then, as I said, they'd gave me a twelfth step call and said, *work the program, work the program*. [That was what they said] that night. I saw the possibility, because the guys were nice that night, and they said *work the program*. Said, "We do it one day at a time. We ask God of our choice to help us to stay sober that day, and at the end of the day we thank him." And they said, "We make only one pledge, and that pledge is, we pledge that with God of our choice's help, we will not drink today, regardless of what happens."

And then we start to practice it honestly. And of course, they said at that time, said "Alcoholics are big liars." But I don't believe that, we're just little careless with the truth. [*Laughter*] So I started off to doin' that, and then later on a guy came in later, and he stayed for a little while, and he said he was working the program. And I wondered what did he mean, because I wasn't workin' the program. I was there, I was beginning to think that guy's sponsor gave him [something] that they didn't give me. Cause I wasn't workin' anything, I was just going to the meetings. But I was sober.

But anyway, I graduated real quick — unfortunately I didn't have nobody to sign the diploma, so I couldn't stop [going to meetings].

### **Not that he *SHOULDN'T* drink, but that he *COULDN'T* drink**

But I told 'em at the meeting, after I was there for about three months, and I told them, I said “You know, if I had known that I was an alcoholic, that I couldn't drink, I'd never had to come to A.A. in the first place.”

See, I didn't know that I couldn't drink at all. See, the church of my choice, and my wife and my friends, the one thing that they told me (and they told me that for years) — “Bill, you drink too much” or that “you shouldn't drink.”

My church told me, “Son, you *shouldn't* drink.” But when I got to A.A., they told me I *couldn't*. Well, it's a different thing in what you *shouldn't* do and what you *can't* do. And that's what they told me.

### **Three years trying to stay sober without working the steps**

But, and they told me to work the program. Well, I didn't know what it meant by working the program. The steps made absolutely no sense to me. I read — I could read them, you know — and I'd read them over, and read them over, and they said absolutely nothin' to me. So, when somebody tell ya that you got to get into those steps and work 'em right away, you can tell them that Bill Williams said, “Hey, you don't have to do it, because I haven't had a drink since I made my first meeting and I didn't do a doggone thing about those steps for three years.”

Cause the reason that I didn't, they didn't make any sense. So I ain't gone work on somethin' that you don't know how to do. You know. I can't play hockey, I don't know how to play hockey, doesn't make no sense to me. I can play football if I was, you

know, physically able enough. You know, I could play baseball, but hockey, I don't know nothin' about hockey. So, if the steps didn't make any sense to me, so I didn't bother.

My wife asked me once, says "Bill, do you take an inventory?" I said, "No, why should I?" You know, don't take no inventory.

Because of the fact is, she had told me for years, and I believe her, "The only thing wrong with you is that you drink too much." Well, as I said a minute ago, out of all the things that could be wrong with a guy, *is but one wrong with me*. I drink too much, and now if I'm not drinkin', you don't have to be smart to figure that out: *it isn't anything wrong with me*. [Laughter]

So therefore, uh, when, when I was drinkin', and as I said a while ago, as I sober up — when I was sober two, three weeks, I didn't think I was gonna drink no more and my wife didn't either — so everything was hunky dory at home. We were happy. And that's the one place I have to be happy. I don't have to be happy here, cause ya'll all goin' kick me out pretty soon. (I don't have to be, but I am.)

But uh, I have to be happy at home 'cause that's where I live. And, when I sobered up I wadn't happy. I was sober for three months, six months. I was miserable at home and I got to the place I didn't want to go home because I was miserable. I was just *sober* — I was *dry* or whichever one you might call it — see I'm not smart enough, I don't know which one is which very much. (But I know I'm in pretty good shape today.)

So I kept on and, and kept on, and I says I begin to wonder if it worth it being sober. Because sometimes I was happy then, now it's no happiness. I'd go home, I'd hate to go there, because the only thing made any sense to me were those six guys [in my A.A. group] and they weren't there. And [before they joined that A.A.

group] they were to drink like I did, and now they were sober. And that made sense to me, the steps was nothin'.

**Second step: having a Power greater than  
ourselves slowly restore us to sanity.**

So finally I was able to accept the second step by sayin' this: "Maybe I was a little insane when I was drunk." [*Laughter*] You know, it took me three years on this program, but found out I wasn't sayin' anything. But I was able to accept the [basic idea of there being] steps thataway. And anything that works, heck, don't fix it, and that was workin' for me. I was able to accept that step and I just went on then, [on] my merry way.

But you know, after three years, God gave me a little of my sanity back without askin' for it. And uh, I began to realize, I said "Well, maybe it was a little something wrong with me beside that I drank too much," because the fact of this: any time an individual will *work* (which I don't like to do, I'm actually lazy) — *work* (which I don't like to do) to make money to buy the necessities of life, and some of the luxuries — and take that same money and buy something that he doesn't like, to make him feel like he doesn't wanna feel, and make him sick — you gotta be nuts to do that, and I did that for twenty-six years. [*Laughter and applause*]

**Before he came to A.A. he could happily go  
five or six months without drinking, and then, without  
warning, he would go off on another crazy binge**

So then I began to realize that it must be a little somethin' else wrong with me, because when I used to stay sober them five or six months, I was happy, I didn't want. I was just as happy then as I am now, you know. But I just never knew when I was gone [go on



another drunk instead of staying happy and] dry. I didn't have no program, I was just naturally happy [most of the time]. I just didn't drink then regardless to what happened, I didn't drink, and then I began to wonder why didn't I stay sober some of those [other] times.

And God gave me enough sanity back to the remember of this — the reason you didn't stay sober for none of those [other] times, because you didn't do anything about the guy that had been doin' the drinkin'. You just moved your liquor from here over there, that's all. And as soon as the opportunity present itself or something happened within this phony brain of yours, you went on back and got to drinking.

So then I came to the conclusion that if I wanted to maintain my sobriety, I had to rebuild my life to fit sobriety, and the thing that I had to rebuild it with was these twelve step card that that guy gave me three years before. And then and only then, did I begin the steps again, [and they began] to make a little sense to me. And I began to apply those principles to my life, and I began to attempt to try to make the guy out of me that I would like to live with sober.

### **Learning to take his own inventory instead of his wife's inventory**

And when I started to work on me, you see, I had taken my wife's inventory because — and I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy — men, if you haven't tried it, please, don't do that. I took my wife's inventory, and I was takin' her inventory because if we weren't happy at home, and it wasn't nothin' wrong with me, it had to be her. So I was trying to change her so she could fit in with

my life. That's what I kept [on trying to do], and I kept it to do that, and I was miserable.

You know, and I'm so glad that I did [not succeed], and I'm so glad that God didn't give me that kinda power or strength or nothin'. He gave me somethin', but he didn't give me that, because see, I been married to that gal for 52 years and she's just like she was the same day I married her. She still tells me when to go — when, how long to stay, and when to come back. *[Laughter]* I don't always do it, but she tells me. *[Laughter]*

Cause when I got ready to come over here, she said "You come back Sunday" — no, no, told me to come back Saturday — I said "Babe, but there's no plane leave out of there, the plane leaves out of there Saturday at 12 o'clock, around 12:30, and they asked me to come over there and stand around in there, and wait till at least 1:30."

"Well, when can you get outta there?" and I said "The next day."

"Well, you be on that one."

"You know I will."

But you see uh, as I say, I'm a tailor by trade and I'd even made — see, my instructor told me when I was in school, say "You can make a pair of pants where if it don't fit one guy, they'll fit another, but you can make a coat where it won't fit nobody." *[Laughter]* I didn't believe that, but I did [find out the hard way that it was true]. I made a coat once and it wouldn't fit nobody, I gave it away. *[Laughter]*

So if I had instructions in makin' clothes, and make somethin' that don't fit nobody, then what in the heck would I do with tryin' to remake a woman over? I'd never . . . that was my purpose, I was gonna remake her. Take her, I took her in, I was gonna change her.

But I didn't, and I'm happy that I didn't, because I like what I married 52 years ago, and I'm still happy with that same girl.

I don't know how she stayed with me, but she did. She told me later, said "The only reason I stayed with you, is because that I knew the guy was out to drink, and if ever I could sober him up, why I'd have a good husband." I hope she has one.

**Beginning to work on his own  
character defects, but only asking  
God for the power to stay dry**

But uh, I kept on going to this meeting after I begin to work on me, and I began to find little things about me, and I begin to continue to do that, and I began to turn my will and my care over to God.

See, God will [only do as much as we ask him to do]. See I asked him, I only ask for one thing, [which was not to drink]. That's surprising, and I was sober — or somebody said "Sobriety? he was just dry" — what, whichever, I wasn't drinkin' alcohol. And if I don't drink alcohol I'm in not in such a bad shape. Cause there isn't a single, sober day been near as bad as no drunk day I ever had. So if I'm not drinkin', I'm in pretty good shape.

**Trying to make twelfth step calls: learning how to  
deliver God's message instead of his own message, how  
to talk WITH someone instead of TO someone**

So I kept on making meetings and I kept on navigating and started to working on myself, and I began to try to change *me*, and I began to try to work with other people, to help others. You know, I used to — I was a terrible twelfth step man, and I used to make a lot of twelfth step calls. And on the first thing I used to carry some

of the older fellas with me, and then later on I would get a new guy with me, cause I wanted somebody with me that didn't know as much as I knew. *[Laughter]*

And I thought — and this is something about that, when you get too much in self, see — I had went back and joined the “I” company, you know. I can do this and I can do that, and I thought that I was the best twelfth step man in Chicago, even exclusive of Bill Wilson.

So I shall never forget this, I got a twelfth step call one Saturday afternoon, and I told the girl that worked for me, I says “I’ll be gone exactly 45 minutes.” And if you’ve ever made a twelfth step call, can you ever time it? and know how long you gonna be there and how late it was? But I did. I figured it’d be 15 minutes to go over there, give that guy 15 minutes of my good Number One Bill Williams A.A., and 15 minutes to come back, in that 45 minutes.

And I went over there, and this guy’d been on a drunk for five weeks, and he was in bad shape. His wife had put him out of the room, back in the little cubby hole there on a cot, and all of his bottles and cans and everything was ’round there. Well, that didn’t bother me. But he was in really bad shape, and I went there and I talked “to” the guy, and that’s what I mean — I talked “to” him and I gave him 15 minutes of Bill Williams A.A.

And when I got through, I said, “Well, what do you think about it?” He says, “I don’t believe a damn thing of nothin’ you said.”

Well, can you wonder what that doin’ to a guy, me, Bill Williams, the greatest gift that God had given to humanity? Can you wonder what that did to me? Well now, I’d heard people, and I still hear people say, “I made twelve step calls and I failed.” And I think most of them mean that [if] they make the twelfth step call,

and the person don't accept the program, then they [the people they called on] failed in my eyesight.

But if I had walked out of there then, *I would've failed* on the twelfth step call, [not that man lying on the cot]. Because that man was more confused then, cause he thought he got help [coming when I walked in the door], and he didn't [feel any more hope from what I said] than he was when I got there.

Well, I hadn't asked God for any help, I hadn't prayed. "Bill Williams had the answer," he thought. And I just couldn't leave, and only then that I asked for God's guidance. Because to me, this is a spiritual program, and you *need* him. See, He know about the other guy, but I didn't, you know. I didn't [even] know too much about *me*.

So anyway, I prayed, and I asked for God's guidance, and "Give me something to give to this man." And then instead of talkin' *to* him, I talked *with* him, and I found out that there's a difference. All beforehand, the man had sit there with his head down, then he began to look up, and he began to ask me questions. And he began to ask me — all he wanted to know is how to keep from takin' that next drink — and I was tellin' him what a beautiful [life] he's gonna have on this wonderful program. *[Laughter]* And he wasn't interested in that.

And then when I began to talk with the guy, and when I left there, he was in pretty good shape, and I says "I'll call you back tonight when I get ready to leave, and I'll come by tomorrow (which was that Sunday) when I get out of church, and I'll talk with you some more." And I did, and then I went by that Monday and I talked with him some more, and that Tuesday night, the guy was able to go to a meeting. And I got the message over, but it

wasn't *mine*, and I'm very grateful for that because it took me out of myself.

See, this isn't . . . what would you say, carry the message? But this isn't my message, cause I tell it before it get to that. It says "having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we carry the message," and I'd had no spiritual awakening.

I had it then, when I found out that I wasn't the greatest gift, and [it was only then that] I was able to carry this message.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Bill Williams the Tailor: Finding God, the Alpha and Omega**

#### **Looking for a firm anchor for his life**

What did I continue to do then? I continued to work on me. I began to learn something. And then I had been around in A.A. long enough to want to maintain this sobriety. Because I was lookin' all beforehand, as I says, I was lookin' at those six guys in there, and I wasn't lookin' at the steps.

And you know, I had to learn somethin', you know. I like to fish a lot and I learned somethin' that I had need to hold me. See, if you get out there in the river to go to fish, you got to have a heavy anchor if you got in a boat. Cause a light anchor, and you're on that water, and it'll just be carry you right on down the grey river.

And I remember that I was up fishin' once up in Wisconsin, and I had a coupla anchors on my boat, but I just threw the light one out. And I was out there and I was catchin' fish, and I was catchin' fish like mad. And all of a sudden . . . I wasn't catchin' anything. And I wondered what was happening, and I looked over there, and

there was a tree way up there, and I was moored in front of that tree. And I done moved down the river, see? Just moved. Well, you can't find no spot in the river — you look in the water it all of it look the same — but I knew somethin' was happenin'.

So then, you know, and I likened this unto that I said: “Now I've got to get somethin' that will hold me, because sometime I might call my sponsor and he's out of town. Or I might call one of the other members, and unfortunately he might have gotten drunk, or he just may not wanna be bothered with me, or what have you.

And I need something on this program that will [have been around] longer than I am, in order for me to be able to maintain our sobriety. Cause I found something then that I wanted, and I wanted to be able to maintain it, because I had lost it so many other times.

And I began to think about, I said, “Well, maybe I'll uh, tie up my sobriety in with my minister.” And then I happened to remember, that I'm a Baptist by faith, and we hire 'em and fire 'em at will. So we Baptists, we happen to fire the guy, then he wouldn't be interested in me no more.

And then I thought about my wife, and I knew she loves me and I know she does, but you know, I have known women to leave men for other things, other than alcohol, you know. Because one guy . . . one lady quit her husband because he came on the program, and wouldn't drink with her, and she quit him and divorced him.

So I says, “No, I better not try this to put this anchor in sister Williams. I better tie it in somethin' that will live longer than me.”



**God, the unchanging and undying Alpha and  
Omega: the one thing that has always been here  
and will always continue to be here**

And in the Bible it tells me that God says, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.” Well then, he’ll be here when I’m gone. I can kinda rely upon that you know.

And you know, I, I began to think about that some, and I thought about something that ties into this strength, and how wonderful man is. And you know, when God made heaven and earth, he just spoke and there it was. He spoke and there was an elephant, and he spoke and there was a lion, and he spoke and there were water, and he spoke and all of these things.

**Not isolated individuals, but  
unity in togetherness**

But you know, when this unity [the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit working together] — when he got ready to make mine, you know, [my own individuality], he could have [made just me], but he didn’t. And I think that there’s a lesson for us, that we need to be together.

He said “Let *us* make man.” He wanted somebody *together* to let *us* make man. And they [all three persons of the Trinity] made man, and found him out of the dust of earth, and breathed in him the breath of life, and man became a living soul. He took that unity, took the three, took the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost, and they made man.

And so that means that man is somebody. Who art man that God finds mindful of him? So then we needed that, and even in the finding of this program, you know, it took that unity and it took that togetherness.

Because see, Bill [Wilson] himself wanted to have A.A. borned in New York, he was on there and he tried. And he tried [just himself all by himself] for a long time, but it just didn't happen. And he came to Akron, and he found out that he had to have somebody else. And then when he got Dr. Bob, *the two of them* then — and here we go and we're in this wonderful, fantastic program as of today. And for that reason we're all here today. So it took that unity, that togetherness, and that's what we have.

**If you're hurting, go to the doctor, and then  
take the medicine the doctor prescribes**

So then when I began to continue to work, and to work on me, and trying to make the type of *individual I* out of me that I could live with sober ... and [when] I continued to try to make meetings ... *I began to find out the little things that's wrong with me*, and do something about them.

I began to do something about them, and the first two steps told me something then. The first two steps told me what was wrong with me. I was powerless over alcohol, my life was unmanageable and *I was nuts*. [Laughter]

What was actually wrong [with me] .... I went to the hospital one day and I was so in hurtin' .... I hurt and had a pain, [but] the doctor wouldn't give me nothin' [at first]. He started to examine me. I said I had a hurt in here, [he said] "That's all right, I'll take care of it." And he examined me for three days, and found out I had an ulcer. Then he gave me some medicine, he doctored on me.

So I didn't do nothin', [it was the doctor who told me what was wrong with me and then fixed me].

So you know, I was just goin' to A.A., and I was stayin' sober, but I didn't know exactly what was wrong. And so then I began to find out what was wrong, and then the third step gave me the answer, and if I turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understood him, he knows my problem, he knows how to take care of me, and that was the answer.

**The fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh steps:  
he had not only an alcohol problem but also a  
“Bill Williams problem”**

And of course, the other steps, we know that — maybe the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh steps — I have a “Bill Williams problem,” and with those, I works on him because I got God to help me in the third step. And I worked on Bill Williams in them fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh steps, and I straightened my life out fairly well then.

And by that time I began to got tired, because I was workin' on me, and I says I'm in pretty good shape, and I says maybe I can sit down. But then, somebody read someplace where it says half measures availed us nothin', and I think the ten commandments said if you work all nine of them and guilty of the tenth, you're guilty of them all. So I didn't want to be guilty of all, and I was liken to sobriety, so I wanted to continue to maintain it.

**The eighth and ninth steps: discovering  
that he also had a “people problem”**

So then I learned in the eighth and ninth step, I had a “people problem,” and I had to get myself right with people. And then I got myself right with people.

**But he still had major problems with his fourth  
step, until he began working on his tenth step, and began  
admitting it right away when he was in the wrong**

And then if I’d been able to work the fourth step in good enough, I wouldn’t a needed the tenth. But I wasn’t able to do one thing [perfectly] when I finally got to the fourth step. After three years, I wasn’t able to do but one thing, [without I] found a little somethin’ wrong [with what I had done].

But I wasn’t able to admit it, [that I was still sometimes in the wrong]. And I think the tenth step says, I think it does, says somethin’ — I will promptly admit it — and I had never been able to admit anything much. Plus ....

After I got through with that, and I straightened out my people problem, I was able to admit it [when I was in the wrong again, like the tenth step says I should do].

**In the eleventh step, learning to  
accept God as his boss, and learning  
to turn to God for guidance**

And in the eleventh step I began to find out what God wanted me to do, and I kinda put him right into my life, and he wasn’t somethin’ sittin’ away off over there. But like if I go on the job —

if you go on the job and you like the job, you want to know what the boss wants you to do — because you want to stay there. And this is God's program, so when [I am] in that, I want to have a conscious contact with him, to know what he wants me to do. Because I wanted to maintain my sobriety and be happy while I was doin' it. And he told me in the eleventh step what he wanted me to do, and I had that conscious contact.

I know he's here right now. If he wasn't, I wouldn't be here. That may not be a blessing to none of you, but it's a blessing to me that I'm here today.

### **The twelfth step: call upon your spiritual awakening, and turn to God for guidance**

And then in the twelfth step ... don't do like I did at the time when I'd only been around for a little while. I've had that spiritual awakening and God directs my life and he tells me what he wants me to do and I try to do it, [to] the best of my ability. And with God's help, I'll be able to do it. I can carry out those messages that he wants me to carry out because ... to me, he is.

### **If you want to keep on drinking, count the cost of your alcoholism**

It's a coupla things I'd like to leave with you. I don't how long I'm to be up here. I didn't ask 'em because I didn't want to be watchin' no time. You know. But it's a coupla things I want to say, [two things that I had planned in advance to say], because none of the other I didn't know I was gonna say.

But these two I did, and one was the price of a drink. *If* there are any alcoholics in this room. Because I'm the only [alcoholic] that I

know that's here, and that's who I'm gonna address this to: *the alcoholics*.

If you have your right marbles and they're in the right place, they aren't scattered, and if you go to buy a watch, and you know the price of that watch is \$150, [you would pay that]. [But] if you are all there, you wouldn't pay \$300 for that watch. That price would be too high. If you go to buy a home and that home was \$50,000, and you know that's the actual value, [then] by the same token, if you were all there and you had the marbles and they were in the right place, you wouldn't pay \$100,000 for that home. That price would be too high. And I could name you a number of things that you wouldn't do if you were all there.

So now, back, if there are any alcoholics in this room, and if you ever decide to take a drink, don't get in a hurry because they're workin' overtime makin' the stuff, so you don't have to be in a hurry. You sit down and think of the cost. Now, I don't mean the price of you fifth of your choice liquor, because anybody that's workin' or on ADC [Aid to Dependent Children] or aid, once in a while, we can afford a fifth of our choice liquor. So that isn't the price that I'm thinkin' about.

The price that I'm thinkin' about is the price to drink it. Can you afford that price? Now I'll tell you something would happen to me if I would take one drink today. If I would take one drink today, my wife will be expecting me tomorrow around 4:30. I wouldn't be there. I would continue to drink here until I drank up the other 40 cents I have in my pocket, and I would be able to con some of you into lettin' me have some more money to keep drinkin'. And if it didn't, I'd pawn my watch. I'd find a pawn shop. I'd find some way, because I said at the outset, no

respectable drunk alcoholic would stop drinkin' after he gets broke.

So I would continue to drink until I would be too drunk to drink anymore, or the police would find me and put me in the jail, or a hospital or detox center or somethin'. Or Williams over there would find me, and throw me into one. I would continue to drink until I'd do that.

That'd be too big a price to pay for one drink. So I'm suggestin' before you take that drink, if you decide to, find out what it would cost you if you take that drink. I only named a few things that would happen to me. Because see, I got on a drunk once and walked to jail and asked the guys to lock me up cause I wanted to stop drinkin'. So see, a whole lotta things could happen to me, you know, when I drank.

But those are just some of the few things, so you think through the thing that would happen to you. And if the price is too much, don't drink it, do just like you would about anything else. Don't drink it.

So if the price isn't too much, you go ahead and drink it, and I'll be here, and I'll keep this guy Larry here, until you decide to come back. And we will welcome you back. But don't do that unless you get a guarantee from God that he'll [enable] you to come back. And then when you get that [guarantee], you could drink it.

I'll be here, because I'm gonna live to get 110, and I'm only 78 now. So I'll get 110, I got a long ways to go.

### **God is my best friend**

So I would like to close this with this idea here, says Proverbs 18:24, says "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

So with that belief I stand firm on this [quoting a poem by Sally Jo Shelton]: <sup>20</sup>

God is my best friend,  
He cares about the things I care about.  
He loves me even when I'm unlovable.  
He is always there to listen and advise  
when I need to talk things over.

God is my heavenly Father.  
He holds me in the palm of His hand.  
He watches over me as the apple of His eye.  
He wants me to grow up to be like Him.

God is my rock.  
He is my refuge when I'm afraid,  
my strength when I am weak,  
my sure footing when I stumble.

God is my shepherd.  
He finds me when I'm lost.  
He gives me the rest when I'm tired.  
He leads me when I don't know  
which way to go.

That's been a lotta times.

God is my physician.  
He mends my heart when it is broken.  
He restores my peace of mind when I'm upset.  
He heals my body when I'm sick.

God is my Savior.  
He forgives me when I let Him down.  
He delivers me when I'm in danger.  
He saves me from the trouble  
I bring on myself.



God is my source.

He is my bread when I'm hungry,  
my water fountain when I'm thirsty,  
my bank even when I'm broke.

God is my Lord.

He is the Ruler of my thoughts,  
the inspiration of my words,  
the initiator of my action.

God is my everything.

Who is he to you?

God bless you all.



## CHAPTER 7

### **Jimmy Miller: First Lady of Black A.A.**

Jimmy Miller was born on December 18, 1920 in Parkin, Arkansas (population 1,378), not far from Wynne, the county seat (which was almost as small, with a population of 2,933 at that time). She got sober in South Bend, Indiana in 1948, the year she turned 28, and lived the rest of her life in that city, where she finally died on August 3, 2002 at the age of 81, with around 54 years of continuous sobriety. She was the first black woman of whom we have any record, to obtain long term continuous sobriety in the new A.A. program.<sup>21</sup> The prominent black old-timers along the Chicago axis, like Raymond Irving, unanimously referred to her as “the First Lady of Black A.A.”<sup>22</sup>

One of the greatest barriers to establishing a truly inclusive A.A. movement in the St. Joseph River valley in the 1940’s was the color bar, which created some extremely difficult walls to cross. But in 1948, Jimmy Miller and Bill Hoover became the first two black people to join the South Bend A.A. group, and the process of trying to break through the manifold fears and taboos of racial discrimination began to take place.<sup>23</sup>



Jimmy Miller was a strong and impressive woman. For many years, she owned and ran a popular tavern, called Jimmy's Bar, open twenty hours a day, from six a.m. one morning to two a.m. the next morning. Her place catered to the factory workers at the Studebaker automobile plant, who came from all three shifts, both at lunch breaks and after work. It was a decent, honest place. If a worker drank too much on payday, pockets stuffed with money,

Jimmy personally saw to it that he got home safely, and with the money for his family still intact.

Jimmy later married Bill Hoover, who had come into A.A. at the same time she did, and was with him till the end of his life (he died in 1986). She herself lived around sixteen years after his death, and died herself in 2002 at the age of 81.<sup>24</sup> Bill was an industrious and dependable man who worked at the Studebaker factory till it went out in 1963, then at Kaiser Jeep (now AM General) till he retired.

Bill Hoover and Jimmy Miller were — along with Brownie and Goshen Bill — two of the four legendary early black leaders in A.A. in the St. Joe river valley area, whose names and personalities, and strength and ability to guide others into the path to sobriety, are still remembered all these years later by white and black folk alike.

Jimmy was almost 73 when she talked about her own early experiences in March of 1993 with G.C. (who edited this volume) and a younger black leader named Raymond Irving, who came into the program in 1974 and was a much-loved A.A. figure himself. It was one of those marvelous early spring days in northern Indiana, with blue sky overhead, and sunshine bringing out all the colors. The lawns were all freshly green now as the grass was coming back to life again out of its winter slumber, and buds and new little leaves covered the trees that shaded all the houses and lined every street. There was the scent of rich earth still damp from the melted snow, and new vegetation. The earliest flowers were now out everywhere: this was the season of waxy white northern magnolia and sun-bright yellow forsythia, royal purple redbud and lemon yellow daffodils.

Jimmy was still a woman of commanding presence, tall, thin, elegant, beautiful and poised. Her house was perfectly kept and immaculately spotless inside, but it was also the kind of place where you were not afraid to sit down in the chairs and relax. The conversation was interrupted a time or two by people coming in to seek her advice and counsel even while the interview was going on. For many of her neighbors, Jimmy was not the pioneer of black A.A., but simply the local woman of wisdom whom you sought out when you needed help.

Much of the material which follows came from a tape of that conversation.

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Jimmy was born in Wayne, Arkansas, she said, in 1920, but her parents left that area when she was only three months old, and ended up settling in South Bend, where she started school and spent all the rest of her life. She still had relatives back in Arkansas, and remembers one trip she made back there in 1956 or 57. That was only a year or two before Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas heightened racial tensions even further in that state by defying the Supreme Court's desegregation order, closing all the public schools in Little Rock and attempting to reopen them as "private" schools, so they could remain racially segregated. She still remembered vividly the way black folks were treated by some of the white people in Arkansas in those days, and the way a simple attempt to take a pleasant family outing subjected you to hostility and humiliation on every side.

JIMMY: Oh, I remember it, I was dying to see Arkansas, so we'd go to Little Rock. I said, "Bill, we got to go to Arkansas, I want to see grandpaw." So we pulled in this service station, my oldest boy, Bill, and myself. So

they was gonna fill up the gas, so the lady come out and told the boy [who worked for her], she said, “We’re out of gas.” And I said could I please use your restroom, and she said, “I lost the key to the doors.”

So the boy said, “Well, this is the third colored person you’ve did this way today,” [and then he asked us], “Could I ride with y’all? Where are you headed?” We told him Little Rock — he looked to be about twenty-four or twenty-five — he said, “I can’t work for her no more.”

He didn’t get his pay, he didn’t get nothing. So my husband asked him if he had any money. He said no, [but it didn’t matter to him], ’cause he had folk. So I gave him twenty dollars, my husband gave him twenty dollars, my son gave him twenty dollars. He had some people in Little Rock, and he took and thanked us.

But it was not just in Arkansas that black people had to confront racism. Back in the 1940’s and 50’s and 60’s, blacks who had lived in both north and south insist that racism was in fact equally bad in both areas. In the south, some of these older black people say, it was in certain ways actually easier to handle, because if you encountered the kind of white people who would mistreat you simply because you were black, they would be totally open and above board about it, and you could be on your guard. You never had to guess what would happen, they said, or what was actually going on. But in the north, you would often overhear white people talking when they did not realize you were within earshot — people whom you had assumed were going to treat you fairly and honorably, based on what they had said to your face — and hear them saying things about black people that were just as contemptuous and hostile as anything you had ever heard from the mouth of the worst southern racist.

On the other hand, in those days, the jobs were up north. When places in South Bend like the Studebaker plant began hiring black people for some of the better factory jobs (on lathes and auto assembly lines and the like) — jobs which paid far better wages than the menial employment that was all that was usually available down south — then whether or not they liked the northern ice and snow and the unfamiliar northern accents, some of the most hardworking and skilled (or at least the most aggressive and adventurous) black folk in states like Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi started emigrating up to northern factory towns like South Bend in large numbers. Whether in good ways or bad ways, they were people who were willing to fight for what they wanted.

But to return to Jimmy's story. She told us that she was employed at a dry cleaners in South Bend, a young woman in her late twenties, when she began to realize she had a serious drinking problem. She had begun working there around 1945, when she was 25, and stayed at that job for fourteen years. She was the classic binge drinker, a hardworking, self-controlled, apparently totally successful person, who stayed totally abstinent for the weeks and months which stretched between the insane drinking bouts.

JIMMY: I was a periodic drinker. Very much so. When I went out, I stuck to my 7-Up, my Coke. I drank at home. I was a loner. If I had a week's vacation from a job, I stayed drunk that whole week. I mean drunk! — go into D.T.'s, had to go to the doctor. We had an alcoholic doctor . . . . I found out about this doctor , and I'd go get a shot, and I'm all right. But I . . . that was my pattern.

Maybe I would go a year without a drink, because I knew better, because then I would be drunk anywhere from one week to two weeks. But I would make sure it was



during my vacation — never lost a job, never got into financial trouble, no kind of way. But then I knew I had this time to stay drunk.

RAYMOND: It's cunning, it's baffling, and it's powerful.

JIMMY: But I knew I'd get drunk, because I know there was something wrong. The reason I didn't drink when I'd get out, go out: *I knew better*. I was going to get drunk! I knew that I would be clear drunk for at least a week, so I had to *plan* these things.

Many alcoholics of this periodic type go through that kind of binge/control cycle over and over for years: in the periods between drinking episodes, they drive themselves unmercifully to do “perfect” jobs at everything handed to them, *never* making a mistake, *never* being left vulnerable to anyone who would attack them. They are often super-achievers, who take on — and successfully accomplish — projects that would cause most people to give up in defeat. Jimmy showed her enormous drive and talent in the business world after she was older, when she kept her tavern open and busy twenty hours a day. Other alcoholics of this type become skilled technicians and mechanics, super-efficient legal secretaries, scientists and engineers, teachers and educators, and ranking noncoms and senior officers in the military forces.

As their alcoholism progresses however, they begin spending more and more time between drinking bouts *planning* the next bout, and thinking about what they are going to do the next time they have a chance to get at the bottle, and how they are going to do it. Jimmy M. was one of these, and made no bones about it — she *planned* her drunks.

Finally those who are alcoholics of this sort find themselves making themselves get through the day without alcohol by sheer

willpower alone, driving themselves by brute force until the next opportunity to let go and sink into the blessed relief of the bottle, where they can dive down once more into fantasy and the oblivion of feeling. And as they begin to *live only* for the next drinking bout, to *live only* for the next available chance to let go — eventually there is nothing left in their lives *worth living for* but the drinking — even, paradoxically, after they realize that the alcohol is killing them, and that they will soon be dead.

Some periodic alcoholics, when they go on their binges, adopt an aggressive, deliberately outrageous and antagonistic stance. They go into bars with an arrogant “in your face” pose that says to everyone around, “I don’t give a damn about you or anyone else.” This is because they are so frightened, down deep, of people and the world — too afraid of being smashed, of being beaten up (physically or psychologically), of being humiliated — so that they must act at all times in such a way that they *never leave themselves vulnerable* to the world.

But a surprising number do more like Jimmy — both male and female, black and white — huddling off some place by themselves, totally alone in their bedrooms, in the basement, in the garage — feeling that they *cannot* go on any further, wanting “to dig a hole and pull it in on top of myself,” totally exhausted from always trying to “get it right,” to “not say the wrong thing,” to “not do the wrong thing” — driven past their physical and psychological limits by the continual frantic attempt to *never leave themselves vulnerable* to the world.

As Raymond said, “It’s cunning, it’s baffling, and it’s powerful.” Only about fifteen per cent seem to be open enough to the pull of God’s grace to realize not only that they are being implacably pulled deeper and deeper into a living hell that will

necessarily culminate in a horrible kind of death, but also to realize that they will have to ask for and accept help. Fortunately, Jimmy — who was a very intelligent and self-perceptive young woman, with great spiritual openness — finally began to realize, not only that she was on a path leading at its end to total self-destruction, but that no matter what she did, she could not get off that path by any power of her own.

And I used to tell my mother, that I knew better. She said, “Oh honey, you don’t need no help. You just drink sometimes.” So she would go and get, like, get the neighbor to go get me two or three pints of whiskey, and I’m quite young, maybe seventeen, sixteen, and when I started drinking she would hand me a pint. I’d go on up to my room. She’d check on me, or she’d bring me soup to eat. And I said, “Mama, I’ve *got* to be an alcoholic.” And she said, “Naw, my baby go’n stop one day.”

But she was . . . .

RAYMOND: . . . Enabling.

JIMMY: She never . . . . No, I think she did the best thing she could do.

Many alcoholics discover to their surprise, once they get into recovery, that there are people in their immediate environment — co-workers, friends, and sometimes even the closest family members — *who do not want them to recover*. Some may try to “push their buttons,” doing things that they intuitively know will make them furiously angry, or throw them into despondency or fear. Others may play the role of *tempters* and enticers. Yet others will attempt to continue to play the role of *enablers* — though usually a little more covertly than Jimmy’s mother, who actually physically brought her the liquor and put the bottle in her hand,

while saying, “You aren’t an alcoholic, you just drink a lot sometimes.”

You do not need to be a profound psychologist to see what Jimmy’s mother was doing, and doing very blatantly and openly. And yet, part of recovery is ultimately making some sort of peace, within oneself, with one’s own family — accurately recognizing and *accepting* who they actually were and what they actually did, but without falling into the destructive traps any longer, and *taking responsibility for oneself*, without fear or resentment, anger or anxiety. And that can only be done by eventually developing real compassion for them, even in their destructiveness. Recovery means *getting totally out of* the blame/shame cycle.

And so Jimmy said simply, “I think she did the best thing she could do.” By that she meant, the best thing her mother knew how to do, given her own background; for essentially no alcoholic comes out of a family that does not have troubled people — people who were victims of their own backgrounds — going back for three or four generations at least. And Jimmy also knew that her present sobriety and serenity, and her ability (by and through God’s grace) to be extraordinarily helpful to other people around her, was part of a life story that extended back into her early youth. And she now realized that, in fact, everything that happened back then was also necessary to have happened, in order to get her to the blessed existence she could enjoy now. So she could accept her past now, and look back on her mother with compassion.

With some alcoholics who make it into recovery, the truth of the hopelessness of their condition gradually seeps into consciousness slowly, over a period of time. With many others — like Jimmy — there is “the one last drunk I had” that brings them crashing to their knees, with the sudden realization that they are

staring their own doom squarely in the face. These people can frequently be heard to say fervently at A.A. meetings, “I pray that I may never forget my last drunk,” and this is a true plea to God from the very depths of the soul.

One way or the other, a practicing alcoholic has *to hit bottom* before real help will be sought and utilized. The delusion of self-sufficiency, the fantasy dream of “figuring out how to save myself by myself,” has to be smashed into little pieces before the alcoholic ego will ever be willing to turn to God for help on the only terms on which God will offer help — namely, in some fashion which God knows will actually *work* (!!!), regardless of the alcoholic’s self-diagnosis of “the kind of help I need” (which is always, at this stage, misguided and just plain wrong).

In Jimmy’s case, her last drunk produced a toxic reaction that left her almost too ill to function for a full week afterwards:

JIMMY: When I drank the whole fifth of vodka, that was my last drink. I decided to go to drink me a fifth of vodka, it was just coming out [on the market in this country]. So I drunk this fifth, I was working at the cleaners.

I blundered at work that morning, the temperature was about 115 in there. I worked for a solid week, without anything on my stomach but a drink of water. I’d get off from work, I’d make it as far as getting on the floor and I would stretch out. It almost killed me.

I didn’t have no more afterwards. But like Ray Moore say [he was an Irishman, who became Jimmy and Bill’s sponsor when they came into A.A.], he was surprised by me being a *periodic* drinker [who was still able to control my drinking to a certain extent but nevertheless] to *know* that I was an alcoholic.

And you know, then I went to send and get all this [Alcoholics Anonymous] literature. I was ecstatic at something.

Then I couldn't get into A.A.

Her last drunk had finally frightened her into *asking for help* — the hardest thing for any real alcoholic to do. Unlike most people who came into A.A. in those early years, she was not yet drinking compulsively every day, but she nevertheless had already recognized that she was an alcoholic — Ray Moore was greatly surprised at her degree of self-awareness — and she now saw with clarity that her life was on the path to total destruction. She had sent off to the New York A.A. headquarters for all sorts of literature on the A.A. program. She had realized that she was in fact an alcoholic, and that no human power could save her — but that somehow, some way, the A.A. people had discovered the path to some higher power that could and would redeem even the totally doomed.

Like a person lost in a dark cave, who suddenly sees the faintest pinhole of light off in the farthest distance, the twenty-eight-year-old Jimmy suddenly realized that she did not have to die. When first encountering A.A., no suffering alcoholic can in fact explain why or how it is that they first intuitively recognize this as the road to life (many continue to fight against the program intellectually for many weeks and months after they have subconsciously already made the fundamental surrender, although Jimmy was bright enough not to try to fight the program that way). But at some deep, inner, intuitive, primordial level, the sunlight of the saving spirit is frequently *recognized immediately* deep in the muddled alcoholic's heart as the path, and the only path, that will lead out of the dark cavern of death.

Hope returns, often for the first time in years, so that no matter how angry they get during the first few weeks and months, or how frustrated they sometimes get in the early days, the alcoholic becomes willing to do anything and make any sacrifice necessary to get the A.A. program. As Raymond frequently tells newcomers, “You must want it with a burning desire.” New hope is what gives us that burning desire.

Filled with this new joy, Jimmy had made a phone call to the South Bend A.A. number, and with the initial blunt rejection of her plea, every ounce of new-found hope seemed to be instantly dashed. It was 1948, and she was told simply that A.A. was for white people only.

Unknown to her, however, a young black man named Bill Hoover also called the South Bend A.A. group for help about the same time, so that a small few of the white A.A.’s began to say to themselves, “We can’t turn them away like that, this is a spiritual program that teaches loves, tolerance, and compassion, and their request is putting us on the line. Are we in fact willing *to put principles before personalities?*” Jimmy Miller and Bill Hoover calling the A.A. phone number at roughly the same time made a big difference.

JIMMY: I had known Bill since '36 or '37. He and one of my brothers was strong alcoholics, so they was running buddies. They used to just say, “Mama, I’m going to sleep on the porch” (in them days you slept on the porch) and him and Bill would drink all night long. You know, I had known Bill for years, never thinking that we would ever marry.

RAYMOND: Talking about [your brother] Luxedie?

JIMMY: No, my brother Jesse. He was a “sophisticated drunk.”

Nevertheless, although she had known Bill since she was in her mid-teens, neither had talked to the other about their drinking, or knew that the other was going to call the local A.A. people.

JIMMY: Bill and I had called in three days apart . . . . they didn't have any set-up for colored people (that's what we were called) . . . . [first Bill phoned them for help, and then] I called in, and they also told *me* they didn't have any set-up for "colored people."

And at the time that Bill called in, Ray Moore was there, and he heard this remark — they didn't have *anything* for colored people — so he said, "That's all right, I'll take it." So they tried to discourage him, but anyway, he made the call on Bill.

Three days later I called in, so he brought Bill over to my house, and he said, well, he would sponsor us. Only they told him — they didn't have any set-up for colored whatsoever — we couldn't come to the open meetings or the closed meetings, so Ray had brought two of his friends with him.

G.C.: He was an Irishman?

JIMMY: Uh-huh. Dunbar [came with him], and the other one was Ken Merrill. So in the meantime, they decided we could meet from house to house, so we met at my house, Bill's house, [and at the homes of] Ken Merrill and Dunbar.

Just as Ken Merrill, along with Harry Stevens, had had the courage to break through the prejudice against convicts, and start what became one of the two most famous early prison A.A. groups at the Indiana state penitentiary in Michigan City four years earlier in 1944, so Ken (this time accompanied by Dunbar<sup>25</sup> and Ray



Moore), showed the courage to break through the color bar when this call for help came.

Bill Hoover, and Raymond Irving (whom he later sponsored), were convinced that it was not simply “coincidence,” but the power of God at work, that made these two particular people — Jimmy and Bill — call into A.A. at the same time. And Bill Hoover was convinced that it was the power of God at work that made Ray Moore, an otherwise perfectly ordinary Irishman who had a job at Bendix, insist on making the twelfth step call on these two black people in spite of the stiff opposition from within the A.A. group itself.

JIMMY: When Ray Moore called on me, he was really surprised that I had the original Alcoholic Anonymous book [the 1939 edition]. I was determined. He say two or more [gathered together and I will be with you],<sup>26</sup> but it’s just a coincidence the way Bill and I called in.

JIMMY: My husband [Bill Hoover] used to tell me, used to tell me that he had a slip. I said, not really. ’Cause after Ray Moore called on him that evening, he drank the next day, and never had a drink since. So you really — I couldn’t even *call* that a slip, could you?

He called on him that day, he didn’t know enough about the program — bad handled — so he drank that *night*, never no more!

Said he was just determined. We really went through a lot . . . .

I said, well you couldn’t really call that a slip, because the man just come over and talked to you, you didn’t know anything about the program.

But I came in thinking I knew quite a bit — which I did, ’cause I had read the Big Book. I read any and everything! Like my *Grapevines* [the A.A. magazines which were piled

up on the end table next to the couch on which she was sitting]. I run through 'em, and then I put 'em right here, and I read 'em over.

Getting someone in the South Bend A.A. group to make a twelfth-step call was only the first of many barriers that would have to be surmounted. Ray Moore — who has been dead for many years now, Jimmy said — continued to come through for her and Bill, and served as their sponsor during those earliest years, hearing their fifth steps, and advising and counseling and supporting them and fighting for them every step of the way.

But when Jimmy and Bill came into A.A., it was still 1948, and the initial terms on which help was offered them by the South Bend A.A. group were incredibly humiliating and demeaning, in often unbelievably petty ways. The closed meetings were still normally house meetings in those days, and when Jimmy and Bill went to one of the few white homes where they would be admitted at all, they were promptly sent back to the kitchen like household menials, and could hear only as much of the people speaking as would travel back to that distant part of the house.

JIMMY: So when Bill [and I] would walk it, they would invite us into the kitchen. The women took time to give us some *broken* cups! And they decided to give us broken cups, so we just took it.

Ray told us, no matter what, be calm about it, so we sit in the kitchen, where we could hear from the family room, living room, whatever.

So then, we still couldn't go to an open meeting. So we just kept meeting, and then, one or two more blacks called, and we met that way, and then Ray got real worried, and Bill's wife [at that time] called her cousin in Chicago: Earl

Redmond. So Ray had a hard time getting permission for him to speak at an open meeting . . . .

We still wasn't allowed to go to an open meeting, but we went anyway, so when he finished talking — now this is a good six, seven months later — they opened up, and said we could come to an open meeting.

We could come to the group, and Ray told us don't be talking, just listen, and learn, and that's the way. And after we got about five more blacks . . . . that's the way the group got started.

But we were treated real coldly at the open meetings, and finally — like several of the speakers, we tried to shake their hands, and they would just turn and walk off — [but] after Earl Redmond come down about three times, then they started shaking hands.

Hey Raymond, what's the other gentleman, Bill's other cousin in Chicago?

RAYMOND: Bill Williams.

JIMMY: Bill Williams — he come down, and after he made a talk it really opened up for us.

RAYMOND: Fourth black man to make A.A. in Chicago.

JIMMY: And I'm telling you! But we held on.

Bill Williams (Bill the tailor) was still alive at the time this account was first written, and was invited to speak to the big annual regional conference in South Bend not long afterwards. Submarine Bill, a good Irish Catholic, whispered in awe to G.C. at one point, "you'd have to travel to an awful lot of churches to hear as much real spiritual teaching as he gave in five minutes."



The South Shore interurban railroad ran from downtown Chicago all the way (in those days) to the center of downtown South Bend, where the line ended in front of the LaSalle Hotel, the city's fanciest hotel. A black A.A. old-timer told me that back then, even though northern cities like South Bend had no formal Jim Crow laws, in fact a black man or woman would never have even been let in the doors of the LaSalle Hotel, for any reason. This is important to remember: white prejudice towards black people, and mistreatment of them, was equally as great up north as it was down south. It was just more covert up north, and never openly acknowledged by white northerners. All the older black people whom I have asked about this insist that prejudice was just as great all across the north and it was in the deep south.

When the little black A.A. group in South Bend was in its early stages, Bill Williams rode the South Shore train from Chicago to South Bend every weekend for a long period of time, to help them in any way that he could. Frank Nyikos, Raymond Irving, and G.C. had a chance to spend an afternoon with him several years ago at Frank's home on Lake Papakeetchie near Syracuse, Indiana, and Bill Williams explained that his message to the white A.A.'s

during those early years was simple. He would say to them, “If my wife and I are going on the South Shore train from here to Chicago, and there are only two empty seats left, and they are right by us, you and your wife are going to sit there. Because you want to go to Chicago too. You don’t like it, but you want to go to Chicago too.”

And Earl Redmond from Chicago also helped support Jimmy and Bill Hoover and their little South Bend group. Jimmy had mentioned him earlier, and Raymond now asked her for more details:

RAYMOND: Do you remember being at the talk, that Earl Redmond made, to help you all get in?

JIMMY: Yes I do. He said, you know, this was basically formed: no race, creed, religion, or *anything*. And then if you read it out the Big Book: it’s all if you had the desire to stop drinking, that’s all that’s required.

Jimmy was referring to the phrase from the preamble which is usually read at the beginning of A.A. meetings — “The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking” — which is the official, formal A.A. statement of purpose. But any black person in South Bend old enough to remember the world before Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., will not be surprised at the South Bend group’s initial unwillingness to accept that principle fully, and will tell you that the humiliating treatment given to Jimmy and Bill when they first joined A.A. was simply typical of the period, and a daily part of every black person’s life. The true miracle here is that, in 1948, *many years before* the major white church denominations in the United States would allow black people to attend their services, even though the white A.A. people may have

dragged their feet at first, they finally started to come around to actually living their own spiritual principles.

So we have to give the white A.A. people in South Bend a mixed grade on this issue — it is difficult to explain to young black people today, but in spite of the rough treatment which the white people in South Bend A.A. gave Jimmy and Bill Hoover at first, they finally learned how to behave better toward black people than most whites of that period (late 1940's and early 1950's).

Unfortunately, even today in 2004, one can still hear a few white people in A.A. in this area of the country privately making derogatory and disparaging remarks about black people as a group, and at times one can still see white people showing a kind of noticeable standoffishness toward black people who come into one of their meetings. But it is also still true that it is better within A.A. than it is in our local society as a whole. In the St. Joseph river valley region, black people frequently sponsor white newcomers, and vice versa. Everyone goes out for pie and coffee after the meeting together, and everyone goes to the A.A. picnics and banquets together. Predominantly white groups bring in black speakers to talk at their open meetings (and vice versa) without ever even thinking about who is white and who is black. So just as in the late 1940's and early 1950's, we once again have to give A.A. a mixed grade: not as good as it ought to be, but nevertheless much better than society as a whole.

I do not want this book to be a hopelessly dated work. If A.A. is still around a hundred years from now, the nature of society will have changed. It is the nature of human history that old problems are solved only to have new ones appear. And A.A. has now spread all over the globe, into places where black vs. white issues have never been present at all, but in which there are other kinds of

divisions, based on religion, language, tribe, social class, or something else of that sort. Can you the reader identify what the equivalent issues are in your world?

And what can we learn from listening to Jimmy Miller's story that can be relevant in all times and places? It is a story above all of real courage and persistence. Most alcoholics complaining and carrying on about "how difficult it is for me in my unique situation to do what has to be done to get sober and stay sober," need to look at what Jimmy faced in order to put things in better proportion. Yes, it may be necessary for me to struggle against incredible difficulties in order to get sober. Yes, it may be necessary for me to make sacrifices and do things that are painful. It may be necessary for me to go to meetings with people whom I do not like — people who make me really angry. It may even be true that other people are treating me in ways that are totally unjust and prejudiced and unfair — and that I can *prove* it to you. It doesn't matter.

The advice from the good old timers is always that we have to rise above the pain. Brooklyn Bob told every newcomer the same thing: "Meetings, meetings, meetings. An A.A. meeting is not the best place for you to be, it is the only place for you to be. Go to meetings if you have to crawl to them. And there were times when I was almost doing that."

And we have to meet these problems with our heads held high. Larry W. told newcomers to remember at all times the little sentence in the Big Book on page 83, at the beginning of the Twelve Promises: "As God's people we stand on our feet; we don't crawl before anyone." Stand tall and remember that the person who wins is the person who survives. And above all, listen to the four wise black people who appear in the story we are now

telling: Jimmy Miller, Bill Hoover, Bill Williams, and Raymond Irving. This is exactly what they would have told you. This is the wisdom of black folk. But it is also the wisdom of the real winners everywhere and at all times and all places. And then eventually raise yourself to the greatest spiritual heights of all, and do what those people did, and do good and show love to some of those very people who misused and abused you. That is the real atonement, the sign of the real healing, the entry into the ranks of those who are honored within the inner circle around the divine throne.

But to return to Jimmy's story. At one point, Raymond asked her what she remembered of some of the details of that open meeting where Earl Redmond, the first black speaker the South Bend A.A. group had ever had, came over from Chicago.

RAYMOND: Well 'd Ken Merrill play the piano or something — didn't he play the piano for you all?

JIMMY: Yeah.

RAYMOND: And . . . I mean when Earl Redmond and them came in?

JIMMY: Yes. But Ken . . .

RAYMOND: And I think Earl Redmond made a statement like Bill [Hoover] used to tell me, said when Earl came down he made such a powerful talk. He said the same whiskey that'll make a white man drunk, will make a black man drunk.

JIMMY: That's right, he explained all of that. It was a talk you just — it kept everybody spellbound. And it opened the doors for us.

In a clever piece of psychology, Ken M. opened the meeting by sitting down and displaying his talent on the piano, playing pieces that the white people present would be familiar with, calming them



down, distracting them from their uneasiness, and also making it clear that the white leader of the South Bend area movement was totally nonchalant and at ease in what for most people present was a threateningly novel situation. The black people understood immediately what he was doing, and were blessing him in their hearts when they saw how well it was working.

Earl Redmond did his job too. Soon everyone in the room found themselves swept into the power and sincerity of his lead. And the white people discovered that, once you stopped making external comparisons and started listening to the message of the heart, black alcoholics suffered and felt exactly the same things as white alcoholics, and were beset by the same alcoholic “screwy thinking” and ability to take a bad situation and make it even worse (!!!), but could also use the twelve steps to live in and through God’s power to arrive at the same sobriety and serenity that some of the white people were beginning to achieve.

G.C. asked Jimmy what she remembered of Ken Merrill as a person, and it is interesting to note that he made so little fuss about his position in society — in spite of the fact that he was the president of a large and successful factory — that Jimmy never even knew exactly what he did for a living. It was very apparent to her from the beginning, however — Ken could not possibly hide this — that whatever he did, he was a very well educated and financially successful man.

G.C.: What was Ken Merrill like? What’d he look like?

JIMMY: He was some kind of a business executive, but what I don’t know . . . . He was very distinguished looking, and tall, and thin, and *very* educated. He was rather well to do, ’cause I notice they had a cook and a maid. So I presume that they — you know — that he was pretty

wealthy. And nice as he could be. And he opened his house freely to give us classes. And we had a class every Saturday morning from nine to ten, clear until we finished all the classes, one every Saturday. And Helen, his wife, was real nice too.

G.C.: How did they set up the classes?

JIMMY: Well, what we went through with the classes was just the twelve steps, explaining them thoroughly . . . . And [Ken Merrill] had a way of explaining stuff simple so anyone could understand it. He was nice as he could be.

Ken's daughter Martha P. laughed when she read the description of her father as "thin," but she said that he prided himself on wearing well-cut clothes and carried himself well, which may help explain the impression he left with Jimmy. Pat Wilkie — a member of the South Bend A.A. group who came from Scotland, and had been in the R.A.F. during World War II — said he reminded her of a retired British army colonel, both in the way he dressed and in his bearing. Nick Kowalski said Ken sometimes wore what the British call a "smoking jacket" when he was at home in the evening, something one would see in the United States only among the top of the upper class.

Both Ken's daughter Martha P. and his son D. Merrill were acutely embarrassed by the A.A. old timers' characterization of their family as extremely wealthy, and in their reminiscences of those years, minimized it as best they could. A cook was hired to come in only on major social occasions, they said, and the maid was only part-time help in taking care of the house. The children's protests are in themselves a tribute to the way Ken brought them up. If they had a little more than some, in the way of wealth and prestige, they were not to put on airs or think of themselves as "better" than other people or "different" from other people.

But — the children's protests to the contrary — the Merrill standard of living included trips to Europe on ocean liners, a large and extremely beautiful house, membership in gentlemen's clubs, and sending the children to exclusive (and extremely expensive) east coast colleges. Nevertheless the important thing (which his children clearly picked up on perfectly) was that although these things might be fun and enjoyable, his children were expected to relate to all human beings with care and personal concern and on a basis of total human equality. Ken never forgot the poverty and struggles of his own childhood and youth, nor the fact that those who had the truly superior qualities of soul in the South Bend A.A. movement, and could be absolutely counted on for *true* friendship, could not be identified on materialistic grounds.

The materialistic side of life can never be allowed to stand in the way of life in the spiritual realm, which is the true life, the only thing that is ultimately fully real. Ken successfully taught his children, that if you try to make yourself feel important by being snobbish and arrogant over material things or worldly prestige, you can never become a *real* person and a *truly worthwhile* person yourself. So when Jimmy Miller's first words about Ken were that, in her own evaluation of him, he was one of the nicest and finest men she had ever met, I am sure that Ken would have recognized that as the finest tribute anyone could ever have made to him.

Jimmy also noted with frank admiration that Ken "had a way of explaining stuff simple so anyone could understand it" when he taught the beginners classes. After the South Bend group set up a regular five class series, with Ken taking the fifth of these classes by himself, Nick Kowalski (a famous local white A.A. leader who had gotten sober in the prison A.A. group that Ken had helped

start) noted that “many came from other towns,” even from far away, to sit in on this fifth class. Ken knew how to relate to newcomers to the program and put things at the basic human level, as one human being simply talking openly and honestly to another, regardless of their previous backgrounds — whether they were rich or poor, educated or school dropouts, male or female, black or white, Protestant or Catholic or what have you.

But to return to the story of the black A.A. group in South Bend: The leads given by the two Chicago black A.A.’s, Earl Redmond and Bill Williams, had basically opened things up and made Bill and Jimmy’s situation a little better. But the demeaning and prejudicial treatment otherwise continued in pretty much the same way for two solid years, with no other black people coming into A.A.

In 1950 however, “Brownie” (Harold Brown) came in, an assertive and highly verbal black man who had been a nightclub M.C. and a professional gambler, along with Cedric, R. J. Newhouse, Lester Smith, and Ezell Agnew. It was now no longer just two lone people trying to survive by themselves; a solid working core of black A.A.’s could now be formed — in spite of the fact that the white people were still making blacks sit back in the kitchen even at that point, and still picking out old cups with chips or cracks to hand them when they offered them coffee.

Even twenty years later, those broken cups stood out in Brownie’s mind as symbolic of all the petty harassment black people were forced to undergo as they tried to participate in the A.A. meetings:

BROWNIE: When I come on the A.A. program, my people wasn’t welcome. They was meeting in the homes at

that time. I had to drink coffee out of a broken cup because they refused to give me a decent cup!

Yes, I've sat in some of 'em's homes, where they put their finger in their nose at me, then they buck at me. In other words, want me to get out of there.

But I wasn't particular about being with them. What I wanted is what you had. I was trying to get sober. All I wanted to do was to learn it. They couldn't run me away. The rest of 'em were behind me pushing, saying "Brown, push on!" and they kept pushing me, and I kept going. It's to say, oh, look-it! It wasn't easy for me to make the A.A. program.

But [when] I come here [into this hostile situation], a thought come to me: if they open the door, I get it myself. And I begin to study this A.A. program. And when I mean study it, I *know* it. I don't need you to tell me about it. I knows everything, in the steps and everything, what it says.

And they told me that this was a spiritually program. Well now, if this is a spiritually program, ain't got no business being prejudiced. My God tells me, "I have no respect for persons." Alcohol ain't prejudiced. It don't give a damn who it tear down.

So Brownie hung in there, and Jimmy and Bill continued to hang in, and they worked the program the way it was supposed to be worked. It takes an alcoholic many years to get as sick as they are when they first come into A.A., and recovery also is a process, that like any healing process (from a blister on your hand to a broken bone) takes time. It takes several years usually of concentrating all your energies on the healing before you are truly ready to start building anything big and positive and new.

So during the first six years of her sobriety, Jimmy said that she continued working at the dry cleaning establishment, putting in

hours and hours of hot and exhausting labor, and saving up her money. Finally, when she was around thirty-four years old and had been sober for six years, she started her own business.

And an interesting business it was — living proof, in the flesh, that A.A.'s are not prohibitionists! She was a good business woman, with marvelous business sense, and opened up a tavern, called "Jimmy's Bar," almost next door to the Studebaker plant in 1954. They stayed open twenty hours a day to take care of factory workers coming off of different shifts, who wanted to relax over a drink before going home, as well as those who came in during lunch breaks.

During the many years she ran this business, it never seemed to threaten her own sobriety at all. She did not care if other people drank — she was the one who had the problem with it. She also had the excellent business intuition to sell the bar in 1963, *before* the announcement on December 9th of that year, that the Studebaker plant was closing permanently and forever (a dark day in South Bend's history).

The bar is no longer there today — the structure was torn down in the process of constructing the new minor league baseball stadium and its surrounding grounds, when the city of South Bend began the process of renewing what had turned into a rundown area surrounding the abandoned, derelict Studebaker buildings after the plant was closed.

JIMMY: I worked at the cleaners for fourteen years. Then I opened up a tavern and ran that for nine years . . . . And then, after Studebaker [started going] out, I was looking up to sell my liquor license and everything, and get out. So the guy that bought the liquor license doesn't — in two months, he had to close. 'Cause he lost all that

Studebaker trade. I used to have to call in extra waitresses at noon . . . .

G.C.: Is the building still there?

JIMMY: No, it's gone now.

G.C.: Where was it?

JIMMY: On South Street, right across from the Union Station. Jimmy's Bar.

G.C.: That was a good location!

JIMMY: Oh yes!

G.C.: What hours did you run?

JIMMY: What hours? From six in the morning until two the next morning.

G.C.: And you had people coming in there all the time, because of the factory shifts?

JIMMY: Yeah, and then they trusted me. If they got drunk, I don't care if they had they paycheck, I would lock they wallets up. I talk 'em out of it, and if I felt they's too drunk to drive, I'd get a friend to drive 'em home, and Bill would trail 'em, and bring the person back.

So they trusted me. 'Cause that was always a big tick to me. 'Cause I don't care if they had five or six hundred dollars, they got they money the next day . . . .

G.C.: Did you bring anybody into A.A. from the people in that situation?

JIMMY: One person! Pasco Flemings. He stayed in for about three or four years, then he get to drinking.

So this extraordinary woman actually made her living, for many of the years that she was in A.A., owning and operating a very successful tavern, shrewdly located in one of the best spots in town for an honest factory worker looking for a safe and decent place to eat lunch or relax for an hour or so after his shift was over.





## CHAPTER 8

### **Jimmy Miller: Forming the Interracial Group**

So after two years of slogging through the prejudice and discrimination fairly much on their own, Bill and Jimmy finally saw more black people coming into A.A. to join them.<sup>27</sup> It would have been around 1950 when they finally obtaining this working core of dedicated black men and women participating in A.A. and Al-Anon functions. Jimmy Miller and Raymond Irving were able to reconstruct the following list of some of the best known early black members in the order they came in, the men becoming part of A.A. and their wives joining Al-Anon: first came Cedric and his wife<sup>28</sup> and then Harold Brown (“Brownie”) and his wife Evelyn. Then came R. J. Newhouse and his wife Grace, Lester Smith and his wife Amelia, and Ezell Agnew and his wife Eleanor.

Brownie died on November 23, 1983, with thirty-three years sobriety, so he would have come into the program about 1950. (Brownie eventually became such an important and well-known figure in South Bend — and had so much good and positive influence on A.A. all over the region — that we are going to have three whole chapters on him later in this book.)

With some of the early black alcoholics, the initial A.A. experience got them going to church, and after they became

involved enough in the religious activities there, they began using the church's spiritual program to stay sober instead of going to A.A. meetings. Although this occurred sometimes with white alcoholics too, it seemed to have been more frequent back at that period with black alcoholics, perhaps partly because of the white prejudice of that time. The black churches were havens of safety from the pervading external racism. The black churches also understood the primordial difference and eternal struggle between God and the Devil: alcoholics would be regularly reminded there in forceful terms of the fundamental choice they had to make.

By my own rough estimate, in north central Indiana, out of every six hundred alcoholics who got sober and stayed continuously sober for at least five years, two or three of them did it by going to a conservative Protestant evangelical church and throwing themselves totally into the life of that congregation. Doing this instead of going to A.A. meetings could work for a small percentage of people. But for at least 595 out of that six hundred, Alcoholics Anonymous was the only thing that worked.<sup>29</sup>

Raymond asked Jimmy about Luxedie, one of her hard-drinking brothers who had gone the church route instead of A.A., and she assured him that, even these many years later, he was still staying sober and leading the good life. And both Jimmy and Raymond respected his choice:

RAYMOND: How's Luxedie now?

JIMMY: Doing real good, still preaching. Here with his daughter. He *was* staying at the St. Joe.

RAYMOND: Well, he came into the fellowship too. I know he made the statement to me, "I shall always be grateful to Alcoholics Anonymous because it showed me my God." But then he choosed to go and preach spiritual.

JIMMY: And he went to very few A.A. meetings, but you know he hadn't had a drink since.

RAYMOND: Found God, said he's found his God.

JIMMY: Yeah.

Raymond also mentioned another person who had chosen that route, a black man he and Jimmy both knew named Mitch C., who had come into A.A. sometime between 1953 and 1958 roughly, had had Brownie as his sponsor, but then had eventually started going to church instead of A.A. to stay sober:

RAYMOND: Well, we got another guy, Mitch C. Mitch got about thirty-five, almost forty years, used to be with Brownie. He's in church now, but he's still sober. Going to this church right here — Mitchell C., worked out at Healthwin — you'd know him. He retired from Healthwin Hospital. He's still sober, but he don't come to the tables no more.

But Jimmy and Bill were committed to the A.A. way. They and some of the other black A.A.'s finally decided that it was necessary to have at least one A.A. group which met regularly in South Bend, where it would be clear to any white people who wanted to attend, that there would definitely be black people at that meeting, and not only that, but black people speaking freely and openly, and taking a leadership role whenever appropriate. There were still too many white meetings where some of the leaders were trying to discourage black people from attending their group regularly, "for fear that some of the white alcoholics would then stay away." It was a peculiar sort of excuse they gave for their behavior. They were claiming that it was these other people who were being prejudiced and discriminatory, not them. That did not

sound very logical if you were black — those who were your *real* friends would defend you at all times and would not allow someone else to tell them they could not be friends with you — but there was nothing that black A.A.'s could do about it.

JIMMY: And they were always afraid, wouldn't nobody come to a group, because if we went to one of their group meetings, after it opened up [then the white people would stop coming]. It was *theirs* you bet! So then we decided on the name, and Earl Ward decided "Interracial," which would give you a hint that there would be colored people there, and then the group just started going.

The name of the group was chosen very carefully, to make it clear that the black people were not interested in creating a black-only meeting. That would be just as bad as a white-only meeting, just a creation of a reverse kind of racism and prejudice in mirror image fashion. The black leaders in St. Joseph river valley A.A. all worked with white newcomers as well as black. Bill Hoover for example played a major role in getting Brooklyn Bob sober (this was Bob Firth, a good Irish Catholic who became one of the good old-timers himself).

And Brownie in particular sponsored many white people, including Red Knaak, who spread the St. Joe valley style of A.A. up into southern Michigan and over into the Chicago Area, and even as far away as Florida, California, and the New York City area. This is important to realize, that the kind of A.A. which was developed in South Bend by Brownie, his friend Nick Kowalski, and their disciple Red Knaak, saved tens of thousands of alcoholics from destruction, white and black alike, and had enormous national impact from coast to coast.<sup>30</sup> And the ideas and influence of Ken

Merrill, who had played such an important role backing and supporting the black A.A. leaders, lying in the background.

Goshen Bill also sponsored many people, and all of them seem to have been white (simply because the area right around where he lived had almost no black population back then, or he certainly would have sponsored black people too).

Bob P., a white man who had lived in the south, was very prejudiced when he first came into the program, according to some of the old timers. This was simply the way Bob had been brought up, and I know that he had never thought about the moral problems of this attitude up to that point, because he was a good man — if you were brought up in a culture that never questioned certain practices, you unfortunately tended to follow them unthinkingly yourself. Bob remembered Goshen Bill walking up to him when he first arrived at Life House (the A.A. halfway house) in Elkhart and pointing one of his long, bony fingers at him, and saying, “Boy, I’m your sponsor.” And he got Bob sober, and Bob was eventually elected as the A.A. Delegate to New York from Northern Indiana Area 22 and was held in respect all over the northern half of the state. Goshen Bill was long dead by then, but whenever Bob talked about him, his voice would get choked up with emotion, and you could still see the undying love in his eyes for that old man who saved his life.

Jimmy remembered that the Interracial Group held its first meeting at Bill Hoover’s house, at 1342 East Howard Street; the second meeting was held at her house, at 1405 West Washington Street. In this way, a small but staunch group of black alcoholics began to develop cohesiveness as they supported one another in recovery.

Later on, Jimmy and Bill Hoover got married. After that point, the two of them lived and breathed and talked the A.A. program from morning to evening, starting off at the breakfast table every day with meditation and prayer, and quiet discussion of the issues each of them was currently struggling with:

JIMMY: Well, my husband and I had a little A.A. meeting *every* morning before we went to work. He had the *Grapevine* and Thought for the Day and we'd set the kitchen table and have a . . . we talked A.A. all the time.

You know, once in a while I bumped into Bill [and we'd have a real disagreement, but] not too often.

The *Grapevine* is the A.A. periodical, with articles by recovering alcoholics. By the "Thought for the Day," Jimmy meant the widely-used A.A. meditational book entitled *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, first published in 1948, the year she came into A.A.<sup>31</sup> *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* was written by a businessman named Richmond Walker, who had joined A.A. in Boston in May 1942, when he was 49 years old. He also had a home in Daytona Beach, Florida, and was a devoted member of the A.A. group there as well. Rich had originally written these meditations on cards, which he carried around in his pocket for his own personal use. Other members of the A.A. group in Daytona Beach eventually persuaded him to put them into a book, which he at first printed on his own and distributed to other A.A. members out of his own basement.<sup>32</sup> This was a book that strongly emphasized the ability of the human spirit to pierce through the walls of the confining box of space and time in which we live our everyday lives, and come into direct, living contact with the divine Spirit.

So Jimmy and Bill started their day when they got up every morning with spiritual meditation, stressing the importance of maintaining a deep God-consciousness throughout the day. Jimmy's son was brought up from babyhood with that spiritual life going on around him at all times:

JIMMY: My 38-year-old son, the one that lives here, he said he can't picture me ever taking a drink.

I say, "Yeah, I quit before you was born."

He say, "Yeah, but why do you read all those books and stuff?"

I say, "Because, you know, this pertains to me."

He says, "It's no problem with me, but I just wondered." And he said, "Mother dear, I can't picture you ever taking a drink."

He knows the twelve steps by heart, 'cause, you know I didn't have a baby sitter at the time, so we carried [him to the meetings with us]. You know, he was old enough to. He was brought up in A.A.! So that they gave me permission to bring him to closed meeting.

G.C.: Oh, so he was there from the time he was a little baby.

JIMMY: He sing "Way book" up one side and down the other!

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As we have already noted, there was still hostility towards black people among some of the white A.A.'s of the St. Joseph river valley, and there were white A.A. meetings which openly told black visitors that they did not want them attending. And it is also important to remember that many black people can still to this day have such a profound fear of white people, that they have difficulty making themselves go into a predominantly white setting. There

are totally realistic grounds for some of these fears: In the American south there were still black people being lynched by white mobs until a generation ago. In most large American cities in the north (Chicago and Boston and so on), there are white neighborhoods where even today, a black person entering their enclave is in serious danger of being literally beaten to death, and can at the very least count on having insults and threats yelled out.

So Jimmy and Bill participated in the formation of something called the Interracial Club House, in a building the black group rented on Ardmore Trail. Some of Jimmy's warmest and most pleasant memories of her early days in A.A. come from that club house:

JIMMY: We got this place out on Ardmore Trail. We was leasing this club, and it was a branch off of downtown. We had a *good* group going! And every Saturday night, and Friday night, was social hour. So we had bingo games, we had dances. Oh, we had a good time!

RAYMOND: What street? Where was it at, what neighborhood?

JIMMY: It's an empty building right off of Ardmore Trail, sits back on the left hand side. It was a nice brick building.

Anyway, we were getting our money together to buy it, so some slicker come in from Mississippi, and he wire-worked hisself into the group, and he tore it up! He and his wife borrowed from everybody they could, he conned people out of stuff, and people just got sick of it.

He started taking the meetings over. You know, we had open meetings and closed meetings: Thursday night was closed meeting, and we had our open meeting on Sunday.



And he just, before you knew it — everybody just — he was a con artist. And then he went on back to Mississippi, owing people *thousands* of dollars.

G.C.: What'd they call the place, now?

JIMMY: It was just . . . “Interracial Club House,” which a bunch broke off from downtown. 'Cause at one time, it was getting pretty crowded down that way. If you didn't get there early, you didn't get no seat.

Red Knaak's mother-in-law paid the first six months' rent, she was so glad that Red had got sober!<sup>33</sup> O.K., [next] she's going to make the down payment, [so] you can just buy the building. Then we'd all got together to make our donations heavier to pay her off.

And this [slicker from Mississippi] — I can't even think of his name now — he just broke it up.

Red Knaak's mother-in-law was so glad, and I guess she was pretty rich, his mother-in-law was . . .

And we was having a ball. A.A. dances — we have a live band, we have security. And see, this was a big night for us. You danced, you had punch, coffee, doughnuts. And you could bring your friends. And my daughter-in-law, Frankie, she couldn't wait — she'd be dressed to kill, “We're going to the dance!”

. . . And on Saturday, when we had the bingo games, it was a lot of fun. And we also made a lot of money, because the A.A. members would bring they friends. And Lucky was the turner — he could not wait to get to turn the balls!

Jimmy still remembered vividly how Ruby (one of the old timers who was still living in 1993 at the time of this conversation) came in to her first A.A. meeting there at the Ardmore club house. When people first come into A.A., they do not love themselves at all. They do not even *know* themselves at all, and what they think they know they cannot stand. As Bill C. (the retired submarine

commander who goes to the Elkhart meetings) often puts it, speaking about his own experience when he first came into the program: “When I came to A.A., I met a stranger, and that stranger was me. And I came to love that stranger. I met people who loved me when I could not love myself, and they taught me how to love.”

An enormous number of people in recovery, when reminiscing about the first A.A. meeting they ever attended, surprisingly enough make exactly the same statement: “I could not get over the love in that room. It hit me almost from the start. It was the most amazing thing that I, at that time, had ever seen or felt.”

JIMMY: Hey, you know, Ruby just blundered in, on Ardmore Trail — drunk as a skunk — one night at the closed meeting, and everybody just put their arms around Ruby.

RAYMOND: Made a lot of meetings with her.

JIMMY: She was a sincere woman.

RAYMOND: She was 80 something in 1980, wasn't she?

JIMMY: Yes. She blundered in drunk, said “I need help, I can't make it by myself.”

We stopped the meeting there, we went and hugged her, made her welcome. Got her some coffee, she couldn't hold it, so someone held her coffee for her.

And she said she just felt so *welcome*. Till she just come on back, and kept coming. And she said that was the happiest day of her life there, 'cause she didn't know people like that was in the world.

RAYMOND: Love lifted me.

JIMMY: See, 'cause she'd been everything from skid row to everything else.

RAYMOND: Park benches to Park Avenue.

JIMMY: That's what she said. Yeah, now she was *happy* in her sobriety.

RAYMOND: I've learned from her.

JIMMY: She was a happy person.

This little story about Ruby that Jimmy told also highlights another one of the most important parts of A.A. spirituality: learning how to be genuinely happy; learning how to laugh again, and laugh heartily and without restraint; learning how to feel joy and pleasure again, and see beauty all around you. The “acceptance” of which the Serenity Prayer speaks is not a grim, stern-faced, fatalistic resignation to what is viewed as a fundamentally hostile and implacable universe. It involves learning to laugh at yourself, and learning how not to take everything so seriously. It means learning to take your quite real human limitations seriously. Above all, it means the full knowledge that *as long as I have God nothing else really matters*. As long as I keep my spiritual eye on God, I can “wear the world like a loose garment,” and remain fundamentally “happy, joyous, and free” down deep in my heart.

That says a lot about Ruby, but a lot about Jimmy too. She admired Ruby most of all because, she said, “she was a happy person.” Jimmy knew what was important. And you cannot have that kind of true, deep happiness without God — you cannot have it at all.

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G.C. had a list of names of early A.A. people in South Bend and Elkhart and the surrounding area which he had put together from various sources,<sup>34</sup> and asked Jimmy about some of the names. Jimmy had especially warm memories of two of these people, Russ G. and Ed Pike:

G.C.: Russ G.?

JIMMY: Oh yes! He stuck with us from the very beginning. He and his wife were sweet as they could be. He was along on Ray Moore's, Ken Merrill's [time]. He's dead now . . . . Russ lived in Michigan — Niles [in Michigan] . . . . Yeah, I know he lived in Niles.

RAYMOND: What about Ed Pike?

JIMMY: Ed Pike was a wonderful man. He was with us too from the beginning — you know, he supported us . . . . Ed Pike from Elkhart.

RAYMOND: And that was my man!

JIMMY: Wonderful person! . . . . He had as much sobriety like as Bill Hoover and Brownie.

In the midst of so much hostility from some of the white alcoholics, people like Russ and Ed Pike — who had both wholeheartedly supported the black A.A.'s and fought for them — were remembered ever after by the early black A.A.'s with undying love and gratitude.

Ed Pike was a railroad conductor, who had spent all his life working (and drinking) with the black Pullman porters, and so he knew that a man is a man is a man. We are all children of God, who do evil in exactly the same ways, and who learn to love and be decent people in exactly the same ways. Ed Pike knew that, and lived his life on that basis.

The one white person in A.A., however, with whom Bill Hoover was closer than any other, was Agnes Kearns, a colorful character better known in the program as "Big Book Agnes." When the two of them were together, it must have been quite a pair!

Jimmy Miller says that Agnes came into A.A. in South Bend before she and Bill Hoover did in 1948, but since Agnes's name does not show up on Ken M.'s list of the very first twenty members (which ran down to around 1945), she must have come in at some time between 1946 and 1947 roughly. She had had a wild and adventurous past, and was an incredibly blunt, outspoken woman, infamous for her forthright speech. She left an indelible impression on anyone who ever saw and heard her in action. Pat Wilkie, who supplied us, just before her death, with so much good information about early South Bend A.A., summed up Agnes in the simple phrase, "a wild, wild, sarcastic woman." When Jimmy Miller was asked if the name "Agnes" on G.C.'s list of early A.A. members referred to the woman called "Big Book Agnes," Jimmy just started laughing and saying, "Yes sir! Yes, yes!"

Agnes, who was white, nevertheless set a personal example, Jimmy M. said, for "some of the white people . . . that don't *associate* with" black people. Agnes and Bill were extremely close friends, and used to meet regularly to talk and chat. "On his way to work," Jimmy said, Bill "used to stop at the bus station and have coffee out there [with Agnes] every day." This was the old Greyhound Bus station in South Bend, which was located in those days on Main Street, just before you got to the Studebaker factory complex if you were heading south from downtown. The station had a place for their bus travelers where a person could buy coffee and sit down and drink it, which made it a handy place for Bill to meet someone on his way to the factory in the morning.

Although the social mores of the time strictly relegated all black people to the servant class — people who waited on white people and fetched things for them, not vice versa, in the northern United States as well as in the south — Agnes refused to obey these rules.

In fact, Agnes never really worried about shocking people with anything! But it came from a passion for the A.A. way of life, and, down deep, a warm heart and a real care about others. If you were black and needed coffee or whatever, and Agnes was there, “she’d be waiting on you,” Jimmy said. “She said she didn’t care what nobody said. She didn’t *believe* in black and white. It’s ‘we’re *all* God’s children.’”

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Skipping down through time twenty or so years, Raymond Irving (who later ran the old Pinhook A.A. group) came into Alcoholics Anonymous in South Bend in June of 1974, using Brownie as his sponsor for the first year. But he admired Bill Hoover and Jimmy from a distance. By then Jimmy would have been 54 years old. A year later, Raymond had finally built up his nerve enough to ask Bill to sponsor him.

RAYMOND: Well see, you may not know it, but when I approached Bill, it was because I seen you and him come out to old Area Hall. Y’all would come up there on Sunday, and you’d be clean, you’d be dressed nice, and that was an attraction for me. And the spot I was in then, I was somewhat dissatisfied — looking — when I seen that. This is why I came to Bill and asked him to sponsor me, and y’all used to come up on a Sundays.

JIMMY: To the open meeting.

RAYMOND: A program of attraction, and not promotion. That was attraction there, to me, to see you and him coming up on a Sundays. Then I caught him, and I asked him, would he sponsor me. That was my reason, one of my reasons, for asking him. I seen you and him coming up there.

JIMMY: And he was glad to, wasn’t he?

RAYMOND: Put his arms around me, put his arms around me.

Again we see that simple but all-important message. When we first came into the A.A. program, the people who were already there *loved us when we could not love ourselves*. They put their arms around us and hugged us. They genuinely cared what happened to us. They answered their telephones when we called them up swearing and cursing at three o'clock in the morning, or filled with the blind panic of unnamable dreads, and calmed us down. They saw the real person shining out underneath, the lovable and charming child of God — the mirror-bright *imago dei*, the holy icon of God — when we could not see it ourselves because of all the trash and rubbish we had heaped up over it.

At about the same time that Raymond asked Bill Hoover to be his sponsor, in 1975, Bill became involved in an attempt to revive some version of the old Interracial Group. The great black anti-segregation leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had been murdered in 1968, removing him as the focal point for all the substantive changes that were needed in American race relations, and unfortunately, even though the civil rights movement of the 1960's, in which he had played such a major role, had changed the world for black Americans in many fundamental ways, there was still so much more that remained to be done. By the mid-1970's significant forward motion seemed to be ceasing. White resistance to any further changes seemed to have hardened into immobility. Blacks who had joyfully entered white-dominated organizations all too often found that there were people who still did not truly accept them, so that black people sometimes began pulling back into little clusters of their own people when they were thrown into predominantly white groups — the black kids all sitting at their

own lunch table in the high school cafeteria and that sort of thing — because it was the only way they saw to be comfortable and hold a normal conversation when they wanted to relax.

Bill Hoover was sensitive to this need for black alcoholics who were coming into the program to be able to talk openly, and without feeling fear and apprehension and a sense of being intimidated. So he formed a new South Bend A.A. Interracial Group which met initially at a mental health affairs office situated in a converted private dwelling on Colfax Avenue (about three houses west of Williams Street on the north side), and later moved its weekly meeting to the YWCA on 802 N. Lafayette Boulevard, where the last listing of its Thursday night group meeting in the Michiana Central Service Office's meeting lists was in 1990.

Now it should be said that the two other major black leaders at that time, Brownie and especially Goshen Bill, were opposed to Bill Hoover's starting the Interracial Group again. People can remember them shouting angrily at one another over the issue. Brownie believed that black people should march into any meeting they wanted to, regardless of whether the white people there were friendly or not. Goshen Bill said that he had gotten drunk with black people, Native Americans, Hispanics, and everyone else he had ever met, and if they could all get drunk together without any difficulty, they could certainly get sober together, and he made it clear that he was not going to put up with any racist nonsense from anybody, white, black or whatever! This split between the three men was in fact part of a difference of opinion that could be found outside the A.A. program too, among black people all over the United States at that time. But Bill Hoover started the group anyway, and it is this new-generation format of the Interracial



Group, active from 1975 to 1990, which Raymond remembers so well:

RAYMOND: [Bill Hoover] was getting ready to start a group. When Tony B. came to Bill from CAP — they wanted to start a group, and they came to Bill, and asked him would he help them start this group. This is how the Interracial came back up again, and Bill — it must have been in '75 or '76 — what year was it, when Bill started the Interracial Group again, at the church? '75 I think — I was with Brownie for about a year. Then I went with Bill, I say '75 — I say '75 — so I had been around for a while, but I hadn't been practicing any steps, I'd just been going to discussion meetings, closed meetings . . . .

Nelson would have the particulars of how that group died off [around 1990], the Interracial Group. It [first met at a location on Colfax Ave.]<sup>35</sup> It was there, then Bill [Hoover] passed, and it stayed there for a while [longer], and then it left there, and went over to the [YWCA] . . . .

[But] I'm talking about when it was still opening in '75. Bill started [that group up again]. Tony B. helped Bill (Tony Bassolini, he's dead now), a guy by the name of Chet, guy by the name of Garden, then you got Lee (Lee's still living). Twelve of 'em got together — Lester [was also involved] — and started that group back in '75. Bill died in '86, and when Bill died, a year or two later, the group moved over to the [YWCA].

The last person I seen chairing that meeting was Nelson — Nelson, that's the volunteer fireman — and then what happened, I don't know for sure, but for some reason it discontinued [around 1990], and I have heard announcements that the group has discontinued. Nelson would have the answer on why or how it came about.

Fundamentally, by 1990, there was no longer any reason for the existence of something called an “interracial group” in South Bend, Indiana. There were about a hundred A.A. groups meeting every week in South Bend, some large, some small (the population of the city was around 106,000 at that time, about 25% of them black). At some of these South Bend A.A. groups you still rarely, if ever, saw a lone black face, but there were also meetings which black people regularly attended, and a few that were forty to sixty per cent black. By 1990, leaders from the first generation of blacks, like Brownie in South Bend and Goshen Bill in the Elkhart-Kosciusko county area, were spoken of with awe and admiration by all the second and third generation A.A. people who had significant sobriety, black and white folks alike.

Raymond Irving had already by 1990 begun to gain much the same kind of universal love and respect that had been won years earlier by his two sponsors, Brownie and Bill Hoover. Rob Greer, a black man in his fifties from Niles, Michigan (right across the state line from South Bend), was also already turning into one of the most successful sponsors in the area, with some of his greatest achievements lying in the area of working with young white men. And we could give a list of many other black people in the region who went around giving their leads before white groups and black groups alike — people who were respected by all simply because they worked such good programs. Things like this made something called an interracial group — such a necessary device in the 1950’s, and again in the 1970’s and early 1980’s — an extraneous relic of the past by 1990.

The period in which Bill Hoover actively sponsored Raymond was a relatively short period of time at the end of Bill’s life on this earth, about eight years in all, but he was able to leave Raymond as

one of his legacies to carry on after his death. Somewhere around 1983 or 84, Bill started to show the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, and his mind started wandering more and more. He finally died in 1986.

Bill's old buddy, Big Book Agnes, started to develop Alzheimer's at the same time, and the two of them helped keep one another going there at the end, as they both started changing into mischievous, fun-loving children together:

JIMMY: You know, [Agnes] come to see Bill, she had Alzheimer's and Bill had it at the same time, but you know, she'd get somebody to bring her over here. And one day I felt *so* sorry for her — it was hot in the summer, and she had a winter coat and a cap and her gloves. She brought a bunch of [A.A.] tapes, and her and Bill'd sit on the floor, and all the tapes was playing.

RAYMOND: Making you live your life over again, huh? [*Laughing*]

JIMMY: Like one day — I don't know how Bill drove her to Robertson's [department store] — he showed me the bill when I got home from work, and he had got her five hundred and ninety-five dollars worth of crystal on our charge.

So then, the next time she come over, I say, "Agnes, what did you do with your crystal?"

She said, "I wrapped 'em. I bought me a bunch of washcloths and I wrapped 'em in washcloths, and put 'em back in the boxes, and put 'em in the closet." She said, "Bill gave me a present."

You know, I paid that five hundred and ninety-five dollars . . . Her and Bill was buddy-buddies.

RAYMOND: Oh, that must have been about '83, maybe '84. She got real low, and they took her to Healthwin Hospital, and she ended up dying there at Healthwin.

JIMMY: Yeah. Just before she got completely down, that's when. I don't know how her or Bill made it, because I thought I had the car keys hid. When Bill died, we found six sets of car keys! — throughout the house, stuck and hidden here, stuck in old coat pockets, Bill had keys. When Bill died, I sold that car.

RAYMOND: And you'd just got it — you hadn't had it that long.

JIMMY: Yeah. But I worked with this boy, and he gave me a deal. 'Cause he got a new car. So see, I had paid him cash for the car. About nine hundred and something dollars.

RAYMOND: A good buy.

JIMMY: A good buy. 'Cause he started working with me, before he graduated from high school, part-time, and he just stayed on with me. And he's still at the nursing home [where he got a job after his graduation] — he's a maintenance man. He calls me at least once a week. Sweet young man.

RAYMOND: You helped a lot of people, didn't you?

JIMMY: Well, all I did was try. Just live what I'd preached.

RAYMOND: Yeah, yeah, right. *Practice* what I preach.

The A.A. program is an action program — the spirit of the epistle of James, with its admonition that “faith without works is dead” — but in these actions we have to act with the right kind of attitudes and expectations. Some of Jimmy's last pieces of good counsel to G.C. and Raymond talked about this. First, you must not do things to help other people in order to get praise or recognition for yourself. Moreover, you will not always succeed

instantly in everything you try, and with some things you try to do, you will fail. The important thing here, however, is to have the courage to at least TRY. *Above all though, actually LIVE what you preach.*

Jimmy was 66 herself when Bill died. She did not feel too much like going out to A.A. meetings after that, with Bill no longer standing beside her. But she still read the *Grapevine* regularly to keep up, and she still served as sponsor to two younger people, so she could continue to have contact with other recovering alcoholics.

JIMMY: Well, see, I've set right here and sponsored two young men, and I don't even go to a meeting.

RAYMOND: But spiritually, you will live on. Because when I pass, and I'm gone, those same people will say, "Hey, he helped me," or either, "Jimmy helped me." So this is one way I think you live on spiritually, I believe.

JIMMY: Now you know, like they're professional people — one boy is 37, the other one's 42 — I call 'em young men, because I'll be 73 this year. And anyway, through Bill, that's how they contacted me.

And I say, "Sure, I'm an alcoholic. I'll always be an alcoholic."

"Can you help us? Could you sponsor us?"

RAYMOND [grinning]: [If you tell me you'll sponsor me] I'll run by here in a minute!

JIMMY: One's wife, the other one's girlfriend, know [that I am the one who is their sponsor], and the women are the happiest persons in the world. Say, "Don't you think you'd better go over and see Jimmy?" when they get irritable.

And one boy, he go and say, "You know, I think I've been irritable with my girlfriend . . . so I think I'd better come over and talk with you."

And I say, “This is helping *me!*” . . .

I guess in some way I’m still carrying the message. Or they wouldn’t come to me for me to sponsor ’em.

RAYMOND: It started out in houses. That’s how it started.

JIMMY: And I say, as long as you stay sober, that’s all that matters.

From the lips of a very wise woman indeed, those words are — for any recovering alcoholic, no matter what happens in his or her life — some of the wisest words that ever passed human lips: *“And I say, as long as you stay sober, that’s all that matters.”*

## CHAPTER 9

### **Jimmy Miller: Meetings and Steps in Early A.A.**

When Jimmy Miller came into the South Bend program in 1948, it was only five years after the city's first A.A. group had been started, by Kenneth G. Merrill and Joseph Soulard "Soo" Cates. So she was asked how the closed discussion meetings were conducted in those days.<sup>36</sup> In fact, when she joined the fellowship, it was only nine years after the Big Book was published, so A.A. was still in its very early period, when they had house meetings, with the group gathering in one of the members' homes each week. The Big Book gave them the basic outline of the twelve steps, so they had that basic structure to work from, but the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* book, which went into so much more detail on each of the steps, did not come out until 1953.

Richmond Walker's little black book, *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* (the second most published book in A.A.) had been published in 1948, and Jimmy, as we have seen, was already reading from that every morning from the time she first came in. Many years later, all the old traditional A.A. meetings in the South Bend area (like Raymond Irving's meeting in the Pinhook Park pavilion) read from that book at the start of every meeting, but I do not know whether reading it at meetings went back as early as 1948.

Nevertheless, this practice must have gone back into the very earliest days.

Ed Webster had come out with the first edition of *The Little Red Book* in 1946, originally entitled “An Interpretation of the Twelve Steps of the Alcoholics Anonymous Program.” Ed was one of the four most-published early A.A. authors, and his book was recommended by Dr. Bob himself as the best introduction he knew to the detailed study of the twelve steps and how we should work them. But people like Jimmy Miller and Nick Kowalski never mentioned *The Little Red Book* being used at meetings in the South Bend area. Instead people went to beginner’s meetings conducted by Ken Merrill and others.

JIMMY: O.K., you know, from one meeting you knew who was going to chair the meeting the next time. And you either had a subject that you would throw out for discussion, or either someone had a problem, and you just took it from there. It went all the way around the table.

G.C.: Just going around the circle in order.

RAYMOND: The closed meetings, you was averaging how many people at that time?

JIMMY: Oh, I’ll say about eighteen, nineteen.

RAYMOND: Small groups.

JIMMY: Uh huh.

RAYMOND: We’re getting thirty and forty now.

JIMMY: But see, when they’d get that big they would split, ’cause they felt that was too many.

RAYMOND: I’ve been told a class is about twenty-two people. Twenty to twenty-two people. When you get over that, it’s too large — that’s what I’ve been told.

JIMMY: Yes. And then that way, like when we first started off, Ray [Moore] explained, we’d come in for a meeting, it lasts not over an hour and fifteen minutes.



Because alcoholics are strange, they get bored, you don't want them to lose their train of thought, you don't want them start whispering. And down through the years, that worked for us. Not *over* an hour and fifteen minutes. That was explained to the group when we set out. I don't care if it was forty around the table. Ray Moore *pounded* this into our heads, so the groups — I guess he got it from the other groups he was going to.

Martha P. says that she suspects that her father, Ken Merrill, the factory owner who was the founder of South Bend A.A., may have been behind this hour and fifteen minute rule. He would have learned this as a wise piece of practical strategy from sales meetings and business conferences, of course, but Martha said that her father also *personally* became very, very impatient and annoyed if meetings of any sort dragged on too long!<sup>37</sup>

We got so good, we was meeting from 8 to 9, we was out of there by 9:15. But in the summer months, we started out closed meeting at 7, so you're out of there by 8:15. So you know what you was going to say, and then, you know, a lot of people pass, around the table, want to just listen. And then, they explained to you, not over five minutes per person, and you could make it shorter. Now this was *drummed* into our heads. See, alcoholics automatically get fidgety, get nervous.

RAYMOND: I'm that way now!

JIMMY: You want to give them something to think about. Now this includes your coffee, your doughnuts, everything. 'Cause we had our coffee and doughnuts, in them days, while we was having a meeting. And see, that saved time, of the lingering. 'Cause when people get done this meeting, and you close, they want to be gone. See, a lot of people don't want to stay.

Now, if there was, say, three or four in a group wanted to go some place and continue, they would go to a coffee shop, which they had enough of, or to a small restaurant — maybe four or five [people] — and then they could eat and talk. But that meeting [itself] was over, and you were out of there.

So back in those days, just as it still is today, “the meeting after the meeting” could be just as important as the formal discussion meeting that had preceded it. When alcoholics first come into A.A., they invariably believe, down somewhere deep in their hearts, that anyone who truly knew them would reject them and abandon them instantly. They are hag-ridden by an overwhelming feeling of shame and guilt to their very core. Their first tentative attempts to talk at discussion meetings about what they genuinely feel and think and have done, are filled with enormous fear. When someone else in the group invites the newcomer to go have coffee and a slice of pie after the regular meeting is over — just to chat most often about things that are ordinary, everyday conversational topics — the newcomer slowly starts to realize, “I am not rejected and abandoned at all, at least *not by these people*, when I start revealing who I really am and what I have really done, including even my most humiliating mistakes and failures.”

And it is not just newcomers: all of us pull strength from the simple reassurance of having some fundamentally good and decent fellow human beings who *want* to share a cup of coffee, a hamburger, or a dish of ice cream with us. It is not just “they loved me when I could not love myself,” but “I have the courage to plunge out into the unknown of a potentially hostile outside world, because I know that *back there I have friends who love me.*”

Jimmy was also asked about the format of what were called open meetings. These centered around a talk by a recovering alcoholic to a much larger group, where non-alcoholics such as spouses and friends were also allowed to attend, along with anyone else who simply wanted to learn more about the A.A. program.

JIMMY: The open meetings started off by reading what you call the Preamble, always started with the reading, yeah, and closed with the Lord's Prayer . . .

G.C.: The person would give the lead, and then would people ask questions, or talk, or discuss, or anything after?

RAYMOND: The open meetings, did people ask questions after? Like that doctor from Chicago, he would talk for half an hour, then he would field, he would take [questions and comments].

JIMMY: No, no, no, they would just talk. The speaker would read the Preamble, and then he would tell his story.

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## WHAT KIND OF A.A. MEETINGS COULD AN INTERESTED PERSON ATTEND?

Open meetings: Going to three or four open meetings can be a good way for a non-alcoholic — someone who is nevertheless interested in how the A.A. program works — to find out more about it in a way that is far more informative than simply reading books about A.A. The truly important parts of the program can only be transmitted at the feeling level, by actual human contact with people who are in the program and practicing its principles. It does not ever translate with full effectiveness into bare words on a printed page.

Closed meetings: You do not have to be a self-acknowledged alcoholic to attend your first few closed A.A. discussion meetings, as long as you (or people who know you well) are *worried* about

your drinking pattern. You are never required to talk at a meeting (ever), or to say that you are an alcoholic, or even to give your name. No one will ask for your phone number or address, or pursue you later in an attempt to “convert you.” There are no fees or dues; what we were freely given we must freely give away if we ourselves are to remain sober. *If you think that there is a real possibility that you “may be getting into trouble with your drinking”* and simply have a sincere desire to explore that possibility, and see if you can learn anything from the A.A. program that will help you, you are welcome to attend at least a few meetings in order to make that decision. Past that point, as it says in the A.A. Preamble, “attendance at closed meetings is limited to persons who have a desire to stop drinking.” The Preamble then goes on to say in addition that “We ask that when discussing our problems, we confine ourselves to those problems as they relate to alcoholism.”

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Jimmy was also asked what she saw as the major problem people had back in those days, when they started thinking about going to their first A.A. meeting. Was it apprehension that all that talk about “God” and “the spiritual life” meant they were putting themselves into the hands of some sort of Holy Roller religious cult? Was it the mistaken belief that they would walk into a room filled with unshaven, foul-smelling old men wearing dirty trench coats with wine bottles in paper sacks sticking out of their pockets? (!!!) Was it fear that “someone might see me walking into that building and *find out* what my problem is?” Was it the belief that I have *special problems* that they would not understand? (I stutter badly perhaps, or I have a block where I simply cannot talk in the presence of a group of people, or I’m gay, or I have been diagnosed as a bipolar manic-depressive, or I was the victim of

childhood sexual abuse, or I have a graduate degree and am much more intelligent and educated and knowledgeable than these people will be.<sup>38</sup>) All of these are nonsensical worries which can nevertheless actually beset people who know nothing yet at first-hand about the way the program functions.

G.C.: What was the biggest problem that you think people had to deal with, coming into A.A. back in that period? When people would come in, and they'd have hesitation or doubts or . . . what was it that they were apprehensive about?

JIMMY: Well, I find the biggest problem — it took them quite a while to determine if they *were* an alcoholic.

G.C.: O.K., making a first step?

JIMMY: Yes.

G.C.: So that's not any different then [than it is now]?

JIMMY: No.

G.C.: So, they'd have to go back out and have some more unhappy experiences?

JIMMY: Oh yeah. Yes.

The first step in the A.A. twelve-step program of recovery is a simple one: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable." But it is this, in fact, which is the hardest step of all for real alcoholics to take. It is a peculiar disease that *convinces you that you do not have the disease*. All the classic diagnostic symptoms are denied by the sufferer, explained away, minimized, or conveniently forgotten.

Non-alcoholics are nearly always fairly realistically aware of how much they are drinking in any given situation, and how it is actually affecting them. That particular judgment area in the brain

does not seem to be gravely affected by a moderate amount of alcohol temporarily in their blood stream. Potential alcoholics, on the contrary, seem often to have a different sensitivity or type of response to the alcohol in the blood supplying that portion of their brains: it may be something involving the receptors or the neurotransmitters within the brain cells themselves, although it is also possible that it is a purely psychological phenomenon. What happens though, is that this judgment center in the brain very quickly starts supplying them with false and distorted beliefs. Grossly illogical rationalizations and intellectualizations start to be produced, where that part of the brain “explains away” all the external evidence that would indicate that the mind is seriously impaired, and simultaneously with this, something within the brain seems to trigger an overwhelming desire, not to quit drinking (“I’ve had enough, I’m going home now”), but for even deeper intoxication.

Since alcoholism is a three-fold disease, involving the psyche and the spirit as well as the body, the person’s *psychology* will be distorted by all the classical *denial phenomena* which psychotherapists are so used to encountering in their patients’ confused thought processes when they first come into therapy. And likewise there will also inevitably be, at the *spiritual* level, a sense of alienation from God (perhaps expressed in the form, not of religious or theological statements, but of universalized negativistic statements about “what life is like” or “what the world is like”). This part of the alcoholic problem can only be healed by some sort of spiritual discipline which will reassimilate a sense of *at-one-ment* (atonement) with the higher spiritual realm. The spiritual part of the disease also produces a peculiar kind of *denial*, expressed in

the form of beliefs such as “God has never done anything good for me” or “there’s nothing in my life worth living for.”

So these three levels of distorted thinking and denial — alcohol-muddled brain cells computing totally illogical judgments about reality because their biochemical and electrical circuitry has been impaired, psychological denial, and falsely-universalized negative beliefs about God (or life, or the world, or “the way things are”) — make the first step in the program the most difficult barrier for the sick alcoholic to cross.

And even after alcoholics finally begin to realize the kind of destructive and unbreakable hold which alcohol has on them, no consistent long-term sobriety can emerge until the next two steps are taken:

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

These crucial steps are put right after the initial admission, because — of the three levels in the disease, the physiological, the psychological, and the spiritual — it is the last one, the spiritual dimension, which holds the key to the healing process. Alcoholics must seriously ask God *to perform a miracle* (in the most literal sense — an intrusion of *supernatural* power down into the natural realm to change the natural course of cause and effect and consequence). And strange as it may seem, the consistent A.A. experience — seen thousands upon thousands of times for people of all conceivable kinds and sorts — is that all the alcoholic needs to do is *to ask*, and to be *willing to accept* what God will so freely give.

It has been made clear countless times that we do not need to follow any traditional set of religious doctrines about God, whether Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Native American, or what have you, and we do not even have to use the word “God” to refer to the ruling, guiding principle of life and the universe. It is sufficient for us to cry out, to whatever good spiritual force there is in the universe, to start returning us to some semblance of sanity, and then for us to start turning things over to this power of simple, elemental goodness and decency and compassion and sanity.

Carrying out the first three steps honestly puts us squarely into the ongoing process of the program.

The next two steps are daunting and frightening to enter into, although the enormous healing that will immediately be realized upon thoroughly completing them, will take an enormous load off the alcoholic’s back:

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

The most effective A.A. sponsors currently at work in the St. Joseph river valley region, seem usually to believe that an alcoholic needs to be in the program, and staying continuously sober, for at least a year before tackling the fourth step seriously. The residential alcohol and drug treatment facilities in this region, both commercial and charitable, regularly ask their patients to write out a fourth step after just a few weeks in the treatment center, but no enormous amount of healing usually occurs at this point.<sup>39</sup> When brain cells have been regularly soaked for years in a blood stream loaded with excessive alcohol, it takes several



months at least “for the fog to lift,” as A.A. people put it. And newcomers must usually put out a series of tentative feelers, in the form of partial self-revelations, before they become truly convinced that God will not reject them and totally abandon them or beat them to death when they start talking honestly about what they really feel and really did and the real motivations that made them do it — and they need to learn that their fellow alkies in Alcoholics Anonymous will not reject or abandon them either.

If we were thrown out of the A.A. program for being liars, frauds, thieves, or con artists; for having some physical feature that we used to consider extremely unattractive and were greatly embarrassed by; for being unbelievably petty soreheads, money-mad materialists, egotistical prima donnas, sexual perverts or totally promiscuous alley cats; or even for being guilty of raping, maiming, and murdering other human beings — there would be no one left in the A.A. meetings at all. All we would have is empty rooms!

But it takes some months of constantly hearing other recovering alcoholics talking totally openly about themselves, and trying a few tentative admissions ourselves in order to “test the water” and see if a crocodile snaps off one of our toes, before most of us typical drunks will be willing to genuinely make the plunge and start writing down, on paper, (1) the things that we internally feel the greatest resentment about, and (2) the things we are most inwardly afraid of, and (3) what the underlying character traits are which make us overreact so strongly each time these particular kind of issues arise in our everyday lives.

There will always be a pattern to our resentments and fears, and usually a very simple one. Whenever something like X happens, I start acting like a crazy person in the form of Y, and Z normally

happens as a consequence. And so I am left with a long term festering resentment, overpowering self-pity, and even more paralyzing fear (or the kind of blind panic that makes me lash out in an insane rage) the next time something like X happens.

Jimmy said that she and Bill Hoover did their fifth step with their sponsor, Ray Moore. Raymond Irving said that he in turn did his fifth step with Bill. So Raymond must have waited over a year to do his fourth and fifth steps, because we remember that he said that he had first come into A.A. in June of 1974, and initially had Brownie as his sponsor, but shifted to Bill as his sponsor about a year later, that is, sometime in 1975.

G.C.: How did people normally do the fifth step in those days? Did they normally go and talk to their sponsor, or did they . . . how would they handle that?

RAYMOND: The fifth step I would admit to myself, God, and another human being, so I would go get a priest, or I would go get someone. And all these things I had wrote down in the fourth step, I would go over. Like when Bill [Hoover when he became my sponsor in 1975] took me back there in that back room, that little office he got back there? He told me I had to tell somebody my whole story.

JIMMY: Yes, but we mostly did it, in them days — they suggested a priest, not a friend, because people felt more confident going to a priest, or their pastor, or just a regular counselor to get all this off their mind.

G.C.: What did you do? Who did you go to?

JIMMY: My sponsor. Bill [also] went to his sponsor.

G.C.: What'd you do, Raymond?

RAYMOND: Bill took me right back here. Off the kitchen, there's a little office they got, and he took me in there. But he carried me through the first five steps. And it took a couple of days, and he carried me through the first

five steps, and then he told me, see, well take this immediate fourth and fifth step.

I liked heroin, and I still hung with thieves, and I hung out with prostitutes — I was a product of the street. These was the immediate things I had to try to get away from, to come into this way of life.

This is one of the most important reasons why a newcomer to A.A. needs to get a sponsor. In A.A. lingo the person whom you use to listen to your innermost thoughts and feelings is called a “sponsor” (and the person seeking direction and comforting is called a “pigeon,” a phrase that goes back to Dr. Bob and the colorful slang terms he liked to use). In other spiritual disciplines down through history this person is called your spiritual advisor, or your confessor, or your guru, or your starets, but no program of higher spiritual development has ever tried to function without this sponsor/pigeon relationship firmly in place. We need a sponsor or spiritual director because the human mind’s facility for self-delusion is enormous, and we also need someone external to corroborate our own truthful inner intuitions and knowledge, particularly when what we ourselves intuit or know runs counter to what we were told as children, or are still being told by many people around us.

In present-day A.A., there are some people who stick around the program (sometimes for years), actually staying away from booze totally, though with some difficulty — but trying to fend off the God language with intellectual cavils, or being too afraid to do a real fourth and fifth step, or both. In the terminology of the old timers, these people are “dry” but not truly “sober.” They lack the deep serenity and peace of mind and inner joyfulness that comes from plunging all the way into the program. They are infinitely

better off than they were while they were still actively tossing down the liquor. But as old-timer Bill C., the retired submarine commander, puts it, “If you’re going to travel, why not go first class instead of tourist class?”

## CHAPTER 10

### **Jimmy Miller: He Knew It Was a God**

The old timers say that when newcomers finally discover a God of their own understanding, you can “see it in their eyes.”<sup>40</sup>

Until that point, with some of them, the eyes seem to show a suppressed anger all the time. They look like they would snap your head off if you said boo to them.

With others, the eyes remain totally hooded and shielded somehow, even when they are looking straight at you. There is a barrier of some sort blocking you from seeing the real human being inside: a false façade of brave and glib bravado and bonhomie, or perpetual pseudo-self-control, or the maintenance of some sort of non-revealing, closed-off reticence about their real thoughts and feelings. You look at the eyes, and you see a phony; you listen to them talk, and you hear men and women who are always putting on an act, to try to impress you or “make you like them.”

Others keep their eyes downcast, never raising them higher than your belt buckle.

And then they finally discover within themselves, a consciousness of a higher power whom they can understand in

their own terms, and the eyes totally change. You can see it by just looking at their faces.

The problem is that nowadays — here in the modern world — there are many alcoholics who come to one A.A. meeting, hear the word God mentioned a few times, and walk away determined never to come to one of *those* meetings again. Fortunately, after the disease has beaten them down even further — for it is a progressive, killer disease that only gets worse and worse over the long haul if you do not come into a workable recovery program — some of these alkie come back, and start working the program seriously, and explaining to the rest of the group eventually — usually laughing at themselves by that time — why it was that they walked out the first time around. This fear of the word God is more of a modern phenomenon however: Jimmy Miller said that this did not represent the same kind of problem in South Bend in the 1940's and 50's, half a century ago.

G.C.: How did they handle the spiritual aspect of it back in those days? Was that a problem, with the people coming in, and getting really frightened about having to be in a spiritual program?

JIMMY: It was no problem. It turned our lives over. We called it God, not a Higher Power, in those days — and there was no problem. What seemed to happen, you probably, you know — if you was religious to first, it seems that the group would go back and get back within the church or something — but that wasn't brought into the meetings. So it was no problem. Now it's a Higher Power, and the Man Upstairs, but in *those* days it was *God!*

There are cultural and social — and hence racial — aspects to this issue. In the St. Joseph River basin nowadays, it is far more

apt to be white people who are convinced that “they are too smart to believe in God,” and who use intellectual rationalizations to convince themselves that they are atheists, and that belief in God is superstitious self-delusion on the part of uneducated people who know nothing of modern science. It would be “hypocritical” to act like there was a God, they say, when “I know that this is ignorant nonsense” — these are alcoholics, of course, whose whole lives are a tissue of lies, partial truths designed to mislead, attempts to con and manipulate everyone around them by surreptitious means into carrying out their wishes, solemn promises to other people never carried out, and so on and so forth — but God forbid that they should ever do anything hypocritical!

Given the way that the black churches still continue to play such an important role in providing leadership and community solidarity to the black communities of the United States, it is not surprising that black alcoholics do not very often come into the A.A. program saying that they are atheists. What they *will* say (voices filled with scorn and contempt) is that “they have no use for those church people.” The hostility towards the things of the spirit is just as great, it is just that it is apt to take a different verbal and conceptual expression.

When Bill Hoover came into A.A. and made his peace with the things of the spirit, he also started going regularly to church on Sunday mornings. But he never stopped going to the A.A. meetings and helping people there too. One of the most successful black people in South Bend A.A. in the next generation, in terms of sponsoring and teaching other people, was Raymond Irving. Unlike Bill, Raymond never felt any urge to start going to church: the A.A. meetings themselves were his church. So we see two ways of handling the church issue, both of which seem to work.

Nevertheless, the one thing that seems to remain true is that at least ninety-five to ninety-eight percent of alcoholics, when they first come into A.A., are quite hostile at the practical level to anything that sounds too much like organized religion. This is so whether they are black or white, male or female, tall or short, thin or fat, right-handed or left-handed. Bill Hoover was no exception to that:

JIMMY: Bill, he said [that before he came into A.A.] he never went to Sunday School in his life; he went to church not *over* six times in his life. So he started going to church with me. You know, he joined the church, got baptized, and was faithful till he could not go any more.

He said, he *knew* it was a God. He *had* to know it after he came into A.A. *That he got sober* — he couldn't do it on his own.

The Big Book couldn't do it. The *wind* couldn't do it! His wife couldn't do it. So it had to be God that stopped it. And he said, it had to be God in the plan, now that's the way he seen it. For our calls to be three days apart.

RAYMOND: Coincidence? or *spiritual*.

JIMMY: And Ray Moore: They said, "No, that's a colored man, you don't make the call." He said, "But I'm *making it*."

RAYMOND: The first black to come into Alcoholics Anonymous in South Bend, Indiana.

JIMMY: Yeah.

RAYMOND: Bill Hoover.

JIMMY: Yeah. And I was the second.

RAYMOND: First Lady.

JIMMY: First Lady . . . . Well, look how long it was just the two of us, period.

RAYMOND: I don't know — how long?

JIMMY: Maybe . . . two years.



The syntax and idioms of black English, among old timers — like some of the white English dialects spoken in the United States in parts of the south, such as the Appalachian mountain region, when I was a child — often preserve, unchanged, turns of phrase and ways of fitting words together that go back to England and Ireland and Scotland in the 1600's and 1700's and even earlier — sometimes not only Shakespearian but even Chaucerian usages.

So Jimmy's way of describing Bill Hoover's faith was to say, "he *knew* it was a God." Translated into current standard American or British English, that meant something like "he *knew* there was a God" (that is, this was to him proof that God truly did exist) or "he *knew* that it was God" (meaning it had to have been God who performed that feat, because no human power could have accomplished it).

A.A. people will talk frequently about the need for faith. The first genuine prayer that alcoholics make on the road to recovery is always some sort of shout for help out into the spiritual darkness, although in their heart of hearts they either doubt that there is anybody there to hear them, or are convinced pretty much that whoever is there will just ignore them. The willingness to cry out from the bottom of my soul and bare my total helplessness and vulnerability — even though I believe at best, "that even if there is any God out there he might or might not help someone like me" — is an act of faith. It is a faith that there is at least some chance that God will not squash me like a bug for daring to appeal to him this way, or it is a faith in the strange spirit that I as a newcomer see at work in the A.A. meetings I go to, and can feel, and almost touch, which I can sense is imbued with love and compassion and the desire to help.

Every time recovering alcoholics practice the true spiritual life by realizing that X or Y or Z has overwhelmed them, and that they can see no earthly way that they can cope by themselves with what has been dropped on them, but then decide to deal with the issue by simply turning the whole matter over to God, they have performed an act of faith. “Let go and let God” is being willing to live by faith.

Faith in the sense of being willing to give God a chance is an essential part of the A.A. way of life. But one will rarely if ever hear a recovering alcoholic who has been in the program any great length of time talking about “having to have faith that there IS a God.” That is, the simple, basic belief in God’s existence, and belief that he has a *supernatural* and miraculous power, is not so much an article of faith in A.A. as it is a piece of acquired knowledge, which we are expected to learn from our own personal, direct experience. It is not an intellectual or theoretical belief, but practical knowledge learned from experimenting and seeing at first hand what actually happens.

That is one reason why the A.A. program is an *action program*, why “faith without works is dead,” and why A.A. cannot be learned from reading words off the page of a book, or by carrying on intellectual discussions, or rationalistically exploring “proofs for the existence of God.”

### **The miracle of the transformation of the human spirit and the return to freedom**

The normal scientific natural laws of psychology and physiology are totally violated by the A.A. experience. Every recovering alcoholic walking around with sobriety and serenity is a

living witness that something *supernatural* in the literal sense of the word happens in A.A.

In popular, everyday current English, that word “supernatural” is apt to refer most of the time to belief in ghosts and goblins and fairies, and witches and sorcerers who can wave magic wands, and the rest of the claptrap that we see when little children dress up in their Halloween costumes. But literally, a *supernatural* event is one in which the scientifically determined laws of *nature* — in which whenever A happens, B happens next, and C follows as an unavoidable and inescapable consequence — has its sequence broken. The chain of events is suddenly snapped in the middle, and something new (and scientifically inexplicable) starts up, initiating a quite different chain of subsequent events instead.

God has the ability to act in ways which are *supernatural* in this sense. And all genuine acts of human free will are also *supernatural* in this sense. In A.A., God saves us from the doom which Fate has laid out for us by returning our freedom. He breaks the natural causal chain of events in such a way that we are empowered to break this chain also. But like all real freedom, it means the freedom also for us to turn around and go back towards death at any point when we choose to do so, which is why, no matter how many years people have been in A.A., they are still left free to go back out and start drinking again. God will put no insurmountable barriers in their way, because living with true sobriety and serenity is *living in freedom*, not trading one inescapable servitude for another.

“He *knew* it was a God” Bill Hoover said: this was not *mere belief*, but *secure knowledge*. It was not an intellectual proof worked out up at “the tops of our minds,” but the kind of gut knowledge learned in daily, practical experience as we attempted

to walk the path of the spirit. And it is what we *do with* that knowledge which will — one day at a time — either continue to keep us on the road of life, or turn us back once again down the road of death.

### **Not “coincidence” but the power of the Anonymous God**

Bill Hoover (and Raymond too) also stressed something else which they insisted was knowledge of some sort, not mere pious fantasy. Too many things in fact happen in the life of recovery for them all to be mere coincidence. After enough time in the program, we realize that this has to be in fact the spiritual power of God working anonymously. Raymond made it clear that only a fool would try to argue this with a skeptic who had never actually tried living the spiritual life, and who just wanted to argue abstract theories as a kind of essentially empty intellectual game. At the level of the laws of nature and the rules normally governing the natural realm, these events appear to be simply the product of perfectly natural events combining in chance and accidental ways.

Within the realm of the spirit, however, most people who have been in A.A. for a while find that there are entirely too many of these apparent coincidences in their lives to make real sense. They seem to be coincidences at the surface level, but they either push you into the place where God will be able to save you, or enable you to learn precisely what you need to know at that point in order to promote further healing, or block you from carelessly putting yourself into a situation of overwhelming temptation by some spur

of the moment thoughtlessness. They are not just “chance” because *they mean something*.

The psychiatrist Carl Jung, whose ideas were so influential on early A.A., called such an apparent coincidence an act of “synchronicity.” The combination of events could not be explained in terms of the kinds of cause-effect relationships which we saw in the physical sciences, but they were clearly connected, to the perceptive eye, at the level of the *meaning* of the events in question, measured against the overall flow of meaningful events. And this was a universe, Jung believed, which was not just a random mechanical assortment of the arbitrary and the accidental, but was filled with deep *meaning*, as we could see from the way it was structured by the meaning-rich archetypes.<sup>41</sup>

Can a clever person still take all these meaningful occurrences and explain them all away as a mixture of pure chance and selective thinking? Of course, which is why there is no point in arguing about it with anyone who wants to think that way. But A.A. people find that when they live their daily lives as though these were not mere coincidences, but God leading and guiding them, their lives go a thousand times more smoothly, and their spiritual growth continually leads them into ever new heights of the spiritual realm. And when they ignore them, and brush them aside as mere coincidences, at best their lives become stale and nonproductive, and at worst they fall back into their old way of life, when they saw the world around them as nothing but a blind piece of machinery, and then they begin once again destroying everything they set their hands on.

In one of the stories at the end of the Big Book (on page 417 in the present fourth edition) there is the simple statement: “Nothing, absolutely nothing happens in God’s world by mistake.” When Submarine Bill’s pigeons would call him in an uproar, crying and screaming, he would tell them to go re-read that page, and especially to meditate on the meaning of that one central sentence. And the pigeons would fuss and fume and rage some more, and then go and re-read that page, and at first it sometimes even made them even angrier, or even more distraught. But then something happened, and they suddenly strangely started cooling down, and found that they could start thinking straight again, and figure out something sane and rational to do next.

**The power of God to raise up  
servants of his grace to strengths totally  
beyond their human powers**

It struck Jimmy and Bill strongly. There was Ray Moore, who had to be a white racist to some degree, simply because of his age and social background. And there was all the rest of the only support group he had, telling him not to make the twelfth-step call on the “colored people.” There was this white Irishman, Jimmy related, and “they said, ‘No, that’s a colored man, you don’t make the call,’ [and instead] he said, ‘But I’m *making it*.’”

It should also be noted, that for black men and women back in 1948, putting your life in the hands of a group of white people was even more frightening. If anyone was going to get badly hurt before this was over, it was Jimmy and Bill who were taking the really enormous risk. Were they going to have to hear these people referring to them contemptuously and humiliatingly as

“niggers” and other racial insults? Black people in this part of Indiana are still on occasion hearing that word shouted at them on the streets by total strangers even today, over fifty years later — I still remember a young black woman coming to an A.A. meeting in Elkhart in tears after it happened to her three times in one day. And in the United States in the early twentieth century, it was white mobs which lynched helpless black people, not vice versa. Ray Moore was a truly brave man, but Jimmy and Bill displayed an even more extraordinary courage.

Over and over again, A.A. people see both themselves and others in the program being raised to heights of bravery and courage far beyond their natural powers, and doing things they never even thought imaginable. Bill Hoover had seen it with his own eyes. No one was asking him to make an act of blind faith on this score. “He KNEW it was a God.” Only some incomparably great divine power could bring such a diverse group of people together, at so precisely the right moment, and inspire them with a goodness and compassion far surpassing their inherited prejudices and preconceptions.

Coming into the A.A. way of life requires everyone to relearn how to live from scratch, by totally new rules and assumptions:

RAYMOND: Bill [Hoover] told *me* that I was like a baby. And I got resentments. “What you mean, a baby?”

He say, “I mean to this spiritual way of life. You are a baby.” Spiritually, I was just like a baby in the arms. I’d never practiced spirituality.

The beginning of it was him carrying me through these first five steps, kind of clean house, and I told him as much as I could then. Then the fourth step, they had a pamphlet around here, like, we call it the seven cardinal sins: envy, anger, jealousy, fear. And he told me to look at these type

of thing, and he showed me — with my jealousy, with my anger, with my fear — that fear was behind all these things. Whenever I got angry, or whenever I got jealousy, if I really took a look at it for what it was worth, I'd have seen that fear was the cause of this.

G.C.: I thought I had only two or three things I had any fear of, when I started doing my fourth step. I thought I had lots of things I was resentful about, but only two or three things I was afraid of. By the time I got to the end of the fourth step, I learned better!

RAYMOND: Like it say in that Big Book, fear should be considered a *thief*. The things I lose, or the things I won't try because of fear — I won't admit it to you, but inwardly, I don't have the confidence to go ahead and DO. *Fear*. So I don't even try.

The *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* says that all the other deadly sins are either rooted in the character defect of Pride, or steeped in Pride and made worse by Pride. And then it goes on to speak of an even deeper truth: it says that lying down below all the other character defects that destroy our lives — down below resentment and pride and all the rest — is always some dreadful Fear.<sup>42</sup> Until we set our enslaving fears to rest we can never live in true freedom.

People like Bill Hoover and Jimmy Miller and Brownie taught us to rise above our fear so that we could find a life worth living. They not only gave us this newfound courage to live, but they gave it as a gift of grace which they bestowed upon us freely. Our life is their life breathed into our nostrils when we lay drowned, cast up for dead upon the shore, and in some sense our lives will always be their life from that point on, and will not be just our own lives anymore:



RAYMOND: I knew [Brownie] the man, and when a person pass on, I don't feel like another person can step into their shoes — that personality, that charismatic [quality], that individual. Yet I could say those he sponsored — same thing with Bill — I am *an extension* of my sponsors, I believe. I am an extension of Bill Hoover, and I am an extension of Harold Brown.

And I feel, if I had it to say, the sponsee can carry the spirit of the sponsor, more so than the person who just knew him, I believe. And I believe the person — the people these individuals sponsored — carries their spirit.

I feel this way with Bill, I feel this way with Brownie. What they taught me, I'm using today. So spiritually, they live on. They passed on to me what was so freely given to them.

In the Sermon on the Mount, it's wrote, by you living this way of life, you will help people you don't even know. By him living that way of life, he helped you, and he's gone on, yet technically, spiritually, he still lives.

This is why I want the fellowship so bad.

The people whose stories we are telling in this book are unforgettable characters. Once you have heard their stories, you can never forget them. Their particular stories were chosen in part because some people are more transparent to the divine power than others. In a special kind of way, we can hear God speak to us through them, as though God were right here in the room with us in human form, and see God's love at work in what God did for them that so transformed their lives, and in the way they in turn have acted towards us and everyone else around them.

The power of the spirit which saves us is always embodied in the lives of specific individuals with distinctive personalities all their own. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels," of course,

for at the fundamental level, as all people of the spirit know, “the extraordinary power is from God and not from us.”<sup>43</sup> But we cannot access this healing power in abstraction from these earthen vessels: it is always the divine spirit as we have sensed it working in and through the all-so-human spirits of Bill Williams the Tailor, or Jimmy Miller, or Brownie, or Raymond Irving, or whoever has served as the channel of God’s grace to us.

So in the process, of necessity, we take into our own being not only God but them too. This little book is trying to put you the reader into contact with the God who saves poor alcoholics from their doom, but the only way to do that is to tell you stories about people. “The spiritual life is not a theory. *We have to live it.*”<sup>44</sup> This passage from the Big Book is one that Brooklyn Bob quoted to us all the time, because he said that realizing this and becoming willing to really and truly act on it, was what turned his own life around and saved his soul from destruction. And we who are still on earth can only teach you about this spiritual way of life by telling you how we and our teachers before us have tried to live it.

This book will have succeeded if you stop and think someday, before acting, “I remember what Jimmy Miller said about this,” and then do something different — and much better — than what you otherwise would have done. This book will have succeeded if someone comes to you some day in despair, and you find yourself automatically saying words to them which you suddenly realize came from Bill Williams the Tailor or Jimmy Miller, and the other person’s face lights up, and you realize that you actually helped them — and then feel very humble, because you also know it was not any wisdom of your own devising which you passed along, and that you were but an earthly channel (and a pretty crude and

unpolished earthly channel indeed) for a divine healing power of infinite and eternal Majesty and Might.

There are so many of us in the St. Joseph river valley who will say that Bill Hoover and Jimmy Miller and Brownie and Raymond Irving and the rest of those good old-timers live in us, and that they taught us everything we know, and that we use what they taught us every day. And we will also tell you that it allowed us to miraculously stop drinking ourselves to destruction, and taught us how to live in a way where we can often come to the end of the day and say, like Nick Kowalski, from the old Michigan City prison group, “the day has been satisfied.”

Please come join us. It is no longer necessary for you to live in rage, anger, self-pity, guilt, and despair. That is what this whole book has been about. Learn what it means to say with gratitude at the end of the day, “the day has been satisfied.” That’s a really good feeling, and it is something you the reader can have too.

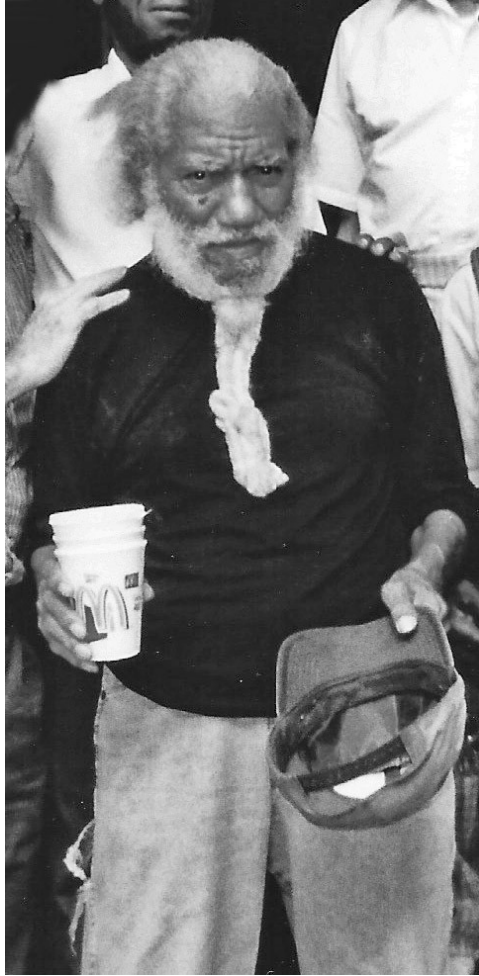


## CHAPTER 11

### Interview: How Bill Williams Traveled to Help Jimmy Miller

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** On Saturday, July 17, 1999, three people came from Chicago — Bill Williams the Tailor, Jimmy Hodges, and a younger man named Charles B. — and met at the lakeside home of Frank Nyikos, a few miles south of Syracuse, Indiana, along with two people from South Bend: Glenn C. and Raymond Irving. It was a little before lunch time that day. The meeting had been organized and arranged by Frank Nyikos. The following is a transcript from a tape recording made by him of what Bill Williams told the group about his visits to South Bend, Indiana, in 1948, to help Jimmy Miller and Bill Hoover during their early days in A.A.

**Bill Williams (Chicago)** was born in 1904 and spent his early years in East Texas. He eventually ended up in Chicago, where he came into A.A. in 1945, when he was around forty-one years old. He was elected as the Delegate from Area 19 (Chicago) for 1969-1970 (Panel 19). At the time of this recording (transcribed below), he had just turned ninety-six. Bill Williams died on May 15, 2003.



**JIMMY HODGES**

**Jimmy Hodges (Chicago)** was well-known as a dynamic and colorful speaker, who frequently traveled to various parts of northern Indiana to give leads. His sobriety date was April 4, 1959, so he was part of black A.A.'s first generation.<sup>45</sup>

**Raymond Irving (South Bend, Indiana)** first began attending A.A. meetings in 1974. Brownie was his first sponsor, and then in 1975 Bill Hoover and Jimmy Miller started sponsoring him. For many years he ran a famous A.A. meeting at Pinhook Park in South Bend, and later became the guiding figure at the A.A. meeting place in South Bend which was always referred to simply as “Brownie’s,” after the major black leader named Harold Brown, who had come into the South Bend Alcoholics Anonymous program in 1950, and had started the famous A.A. meetings there.



**RAYMOND IRVING**

**When the tape recorder was turned on, Glenn C., to start things going, read from a transcript of Jimmy Miller's story, and then asked Bill Williams what he himself remembered about those events:**

JIMMY HODGES: It was December '45. Cause Redmond came in in March, you told me ....

BILL WILLIAMS: But anyway, I know Redmond came in in March, and I came in that following December.

GLENN: So when you came to South Bend [in 1948 to help our newly started black A.A. group there] you had about four or five years sobriety behind you? You had a good program by then.

BILL WILLIAMS: Oh yeah, I was pretty solid. I knew by that time that it was going to work. Cause the first — see, when I first came in, it was my intention to only stay three years. *[Laughter]* And I knew that I would get it, and I would know anything to do in three years. Because I'm a tailor by trade, and I went to school, and they wanted me three years to finish tailoring. I finished it in one year. I said, if I can finish tailoring in one year, and I can make anything now to be made out of cloth — and I still do a little of it — well, I could get this in three years. So I figured in three years, I'd have this — and I planned to stop going to the meetings! *[Laughter]* . . . .

[But] see, this is — see, Alcoholics Anonymous isn't something that you get. It's a principle that we *practice*. I been in church since 1911. I been a member of a Baptist church since 1911. I *still* go to Sunday School and church every Sunday. I haven't finished it!

You can't complete that .... A.A. isn't something that you will get. It's a principle that we *practice*. And the word practice is we haven't completed it. You never heard a doctor yet — how long



he's been in business — there's a sign up there, he's "practicing medicine." He's practicing.

What Alcoholics Anonymous .... It's something said, and I hear people say, and you probably have heard it in your group, that they've been around a few years, and they're "cured." Ain't no such a thing as an alcoholic being cured! There is two incurable diseases, two known incurable diseases. There's alcoholism and ... diabetes .... They are *arrested*. If I was "cured," I could drink this alcohol now and go on and do all right. But see, alcoholism is one of the progressive, incurable diseases. The disease progress even though you don't drink. You don't have to drink to make it get worse! All we have to do is to stay alive [*laughter*] and it will get worse. Two diseases like that, alcoholism and diabetes. Nobody — doctors are smart, but they've never found a cure for diabetes .... It's something with our system .... I can drink anything [else] I want to, but I can't drink alcohol ....

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GLENN: Now when you came into A.A. in Chicago, in 1945, did you hit trouble there too? Was there a color bar .... there in Chicago in 1945? I don't know anything about Chicago.

BILL WILLIAMS: Oh yeah! Yeah, it was the same thing. It's still prejudiced, even now.

GLENN: How did you deal with that? In Chicago, in 1945?

BILL WILLIAMS: Well, I was born in Texas.

RAYMOND IRVING: He's a cowboy! [*Laughter*]

JIMMY HODGES: You all got into A.A., and you had to go out to Evanston, and Joe Diggles and all of 'em.

And the guy said, Earl Treat, said and all, "Give us ninety days." Tell us about that ....

Editor's note: Earl Treat was the founder of A.A. in Chicago. Earl had come to Akron to learn about the A.A. program directly from Dr. Bob, then returned to Chicago. After a brief slip there in Chicago in July of 1937, he got sober again and remained so for the rest of his life. On September 20, 1939, the Chicago A.A. group he had formed had its first official group meeting, in the suburb of Evanston, in Earl's apartment. There were only eight of them, but by the end of 1940, this had grown to 200.

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BILL WILLIAMS: See, happened my wife was related to Bill [Hoover]'s, some of Bill's family, and they had told her about it, told them about it. So I came over here. I came over here, I brought four other members from my group, over here from Chicago. Myself — see, this all happened before some of that, what you was reading, was happening. See, at the time, Bill [Hoover] couldn't go to the meetings. He could go to some of the meetings, but especially he couldn't go to the open meetings. And I came.

So fortunately, my wife was a distant relative to him, and so that's the way I met Bill. I didn't know him before. So with about five of the members of my group, we came over here one Sunday, and talked at Bill [Hoover]'s house [at 1242 Howard St. in South Bend].

And after we met, that's [when] they told him it's all right, but you can't go to the big meeting, on a Sunday. So then I asked why. Then they begin telling, "Well you see, our wives wouldn't like that."



After the meeting at Frank Nyikos's home, we took Bill Williams (right above) to visit Jimmy Miller (on the left), where they talked about the old days when Bill Williams visited South Bend regularly to give support to Jimmy and Bill Hoover when they were first starting their work of breaking through the color barrier in South Bend.

And I listened to them talking. When they got through, I says, "Listen," I said, "if I had to go to Chicago from here in the morning — I lived here, I got to go to Chicago. Wasn't but one train go, *one bus* go to Chicago, and I had to be there. And if I was on the train, and you got on ... because I was on there, and I was black, you wouldn't get off! Because you had to go to Chicago too." I said, "By the same token, if I go to the meeting, your wife cares less than a damn about me. She's there interested in you. So

she's not gone go leave the meeting because *I come*. Because I'm going there for a purpose, and she's there to help you."

So one of the fellows said it, he laughed, he said, "Well that's true." . . .

So when I got through — see, before — before that, they didn't want Bill [Hoover] to come to the open meeting. Well, I *knew* the reason. I'm from Texas, and I *know* the reason.

GLENN: O.K., so am I [from Texas], yeah, so am I.

BILL WILLIAMS: I know the reason that they didn't want Bill [Hoover] to come to the meeting. Say, all right, say right now [pointing to the only empty chair in Frank's lakeside room]: it's only one chair sit here now. If I'm sitting right there, and this man is sitting here — black — your wife come in, that's the only seat. She's gone sit down there. She ain't gone leave because she just got her one seat, cause she's interested in you. She cares less than a doggoned about me. It was only *him*."

I said, "Now it's only you guys that don't [want] your wife to sit in a chair close to me .... I can understand that. I know that .... But that isn't the point .... The point is that we're all here for one particular purpose. The alcoholics are here to mend their alcoholism. Your wife is here to learn what makes me tick."

"See, the non-alcoholic — the husband or wife — don't know why we drank. They don't know that alcohol makes us THIRSTY. [Laughter] Now this tea — see, this tea — it quenches my thirst. See, I drank this, and this'll be about all I want. I might would like another cup an hour or so from now .... but you see, it quenches my thirst. But if this was alcohol — and I am an alcoholic — it makes me *thirsty*."

GLENN: For more.

BILL WILLIAMS: .... See, when Hoover came in, the fellows would go over to his house and talk, but they didn't want him, or none of us, to come to the open meeting .... They said, "We'll come to your house to the meeting, but you can't come to .... they was meeting in the church. Raymond, are they still meeting in that church? And anyways, they were meeting in the church — that was an open meeting, where the husbands and wives were there. They didn't want them to come there, and they come and talking about, "Well, you see our wives gone to complain." I listened, to a while, until they begin to do things to me inside. I said, "Listen, let me tell you something, you *further something* ...."

I said, "The thing of it is, and I know — I ain't dumb, I ain't stupid — I may be dumb, but I'm not stupid. The point is, if there's only one seat here — that's just this one seat that's open — your wife come to this meeting, you don't want her sitting there close to me." I said, "That's it." The guy looked at me! And .... I said, "She's not thinking about me, and I'm not thinking about her. I got my wife at home. I'm not thinking about [your wife]."

So further come to further. Look at me, and they smile. They say, "Yeah," said, "that's it, Bill."

I said, "I know it is ...."

JIMMY HODGES: And that made it better there in South Bend when you guys got together.

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GLENN: Do you remember? — does anybody know? — were they having the open meetings at St. James church at that point, or was it at the Hotel LaSalle?

RAYMOND IRVING: Bill [Hoover] said it was at St. James Cathedral . . . .

JIMMY HODGES: Yeah, I think he told me that — that was later on. When did he die? Bill, Bill — cause I met Bill Hoover.

RAYMOND IRVING: He just die about '85, '86.

JIMMY HODGES: Yeah, cause I was up there before he died. And he came to that meeting — that was Brownie — but didn't they have a meeting named after him there, didn't they have a . . . ?

BILL WILLIAMS: Bill Hoover?

JIMMY HODGES: Bill Hoover.

BILL WILLIAMS: Yes, there's a group named after Bill Hoover.

RAYMOND IRVING: "Interracial Group."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Raymond Irving and Jimmy Hodges then summarized what they felt was the real significance of what happened in South Bend back in 1948 and 1949, based upon what they already knew, and what Bill Williams had talked about so movingly at this meeting.

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RAYMOND IRVING: Tell me, here's something I never got straight. Bill say it was either you or Earl Redmond, one of you all made the statement, "Same whiskey as get a white man drunk, 'll get a black man drunk."

BILL WILLIAMS: Earl made that one.

RAYMOND IRVING: That was Earl ....

JIMMY HODGES: Yeah, one of the main reasons, I believe, after they came — I'm just carrying around, cause he told the story already. But I'm just saying, after he came — after they came — and then they got in harmony, and they said "You're right," and so they got together, and I think they open up the doors. Everybody got in the spirit, and ... that's the main thing ....

RAYMOND IRVING: After he left, after he came and talked, Ken Merrill, he played piano, and in playing the piano, this was the way of accepting blacks into the program — Ken Merrill. I wasn't there now.

BILL WILLIAMS: I was there.

RAYMOND IRVING: But you said, after they played the piano, this was making the amends.

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## How Ken Merrill Played the Piano

Celebrating a victory over racism

Ken Merrill (the founder of A.A. in South Bend, who was a white man) opened the meeting in a way that had never been done before, by sitting down and playing the piano for all the people who were assembled. This was one of Ken's more unexpected talents: he had been a professional church organist for part of his life, and (on a piano) could play everything from the latest jazz to truly difficult classical pieces, almost totally by ear. As Raymond noted, this symbolic gesture was a way for some of the white people in South Bend A.A. to begin making amends for the wrong they had done to the black members, and a way for them to extend the olive branch of peace by turning this first visit by a black speaker into a day of jubilee, if you wish. It was something special offered by the white people who were leading that meeting, to show that they too now realized that this was a very special welcoming, where they wanted to pull out all the stops and do something far beyond the ordinary for this meeting.

Earl Redmond did his job too. Soon everyone in the room found themselves swept into the power and sincerity of his lead. And the white people discovered that, once you stopped making external comparisons and started listening to the message of the heart, black alcoholics suffered and

felt exactly the same things as white alcoholics, but could also use the twelve steps to live in and through God's power to arrive at the same sobriety and serenity that some of the white people were beginning to achieve.

When Bill Williams subsequently came over from Chicago to give his lead at the South Bend open meeting, the effect (as Jimmy Miller remembered it) was even more powerful. So being able to actually listen to Bill himself talking about his memories of his part in those same events was a special treat, because (although he was now 96 years old) he still remembered clearly his trips to South Bend some fifty years earlier.

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JIMMY HODGES: And I hear what was said, and so I know now how it got started, how that integration came about — spiritually — not officially through politics. Because I found out something here today, and I've heard it leaped through, but I heard it talked though and lived through here.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The small black (or actually interracial) A.A. group in Chicago was then for two or three years an absolutely vital support to Bill Hoover and Jimmy Miller in South Bend, and the small group of black A.A.'s that started to form around them there in north central Indiana beginning in 1948, 1949, and 1950.

Bill Williams the Tailor then made a few more comments about that period, and how he and the Chicago people had traveled over to help the little group of black A.A.'s which had begun forming there.

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BILL WILLIAMS: Oh, about three years one of us came — one, two, or three of us — came over here every Sunday afternoon ... whatever time it was.

GLENN: To support the people in South Bend. To support those people in South Bend.

BILL WILLIAMS: Yeah. Cause, see at points it was just Bill [Hoover] and some woman — I forget her name — black woman.

RAYMOND IRVING and GLENN: Jimmy.

BILL WILLIAMS: That was the only two it was.



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## **Race Relations in the Northern United States**

### **During the 1930's and 40's and afterwards**

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Any black person in South Bend old enough to remember the world before Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. will tell you that the humiliating treatment given to Jimmy Miller and Bill Hoover at first was simply typical of the period, and that such treatment was a daily part of every black person's life. Many white people in the United States to this day believe that racial discrimination against black people only happened in the southern states, but any black person who has lived in both parts of the country, will tell you that racial discrimination both is and was equally bad in both north and south.

Black people who began leaving the south to live in northern cities around the mid-twentieth century moved because that is where the jobs were, in the factories and foundries, not because there was less prejudice there, or any less likelihood of being beaten or killed by white people.

**KING'S PROBLEMS IN CHICAGO:** Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., did not begin his work until several years after the first black men and women came into A.A. in Chicago and South Bend (which was between 1945 and 1948). Dr. King's first major protest had been the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955. This took place in the south, in Alabama, as did the major integration campaign he carried out later on in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. It was only after this that Dr. King went north to work in Chicago, where his marchers

were met by white mobs led by uniformed Neo-Nazis and Ku Klux Klansmen, in an even more violent and vicious opposition than he had encountered in the south. When King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, it could be argued that Chicago still stood as a partial failure for him: that city had proven to be far more resistant than the cities of the American south to truly basic change in racial attitudes at the public and political level.

**A.A. IN CHICAGO AND SOUTH BEND:** So the world inside A.A. circles in Chicago and South Bend was in fact twenty years ahead of the world outside of them on racial issues: getting black people into some of the closed meetings (on any terms) was a miracle for the 1940's, and getting them into the open meetings was a further miracle, and putting an end to at least some of the discriminatory treatment was yet another miracle.

Young people today often do not realize (until they look back at how bad things were in the 1930's and early 40's) how much was actually accomplished in eliminating at least some of the worst kinds of racism in A.A. in the years which followed, and how difficult it was to bring this about.

It was done by attacking the issues at the fundamental spiritual level, and by insisting that the spiritual principles of the program had to take precedence over personalities, and personal likes and dislikes, and politics, and blind cultural taboos. It also took a handful of people, both black and white, who had an astonishing courage, and a willingness to speak lovingly, but boldly and honestly, when basic spiritual principles were at stake.

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## CHAPTER 12

### **Brownie: the Professional Gambler and the St. Louis Blues**

With his flamboyant manner and gift with words, Brownie had become one of the great legendary figures of northern Indiana A.A. by the time of his death in 1983.<sup>46</sup> Around 1972 (he had been sober for about twenty-two years at that point) someone tape recorded one of his leads, so we have a lot of Brownie's story in his own words.<sup>47</sup>

Harold Brown was born on July 5, 1914, in St. Louis, Missouri. The city he knew during his childhood was the Mississippi river boat town, forty-five per cent black, immortalized in the great jazz classic, the "St. Louis Blues," composed by W. C. Handy the year Brownie was born.

I hate to see that evening sun go down,  
I hate to see that evening sun go down,  
Because my baby, she done left this town.

Brownie spent his teenage years, during the Golden Age of Jazz, in one of the great centers for this new American music — an exciting time for a young black man.



Brownie (Harold Brown)

If portions of his transcribed lead given in this chapter are difficult to follow, it is because he continued to speak in the heavy black idiom of that river port, the language of the gamblers, prostitutes, nightclub denizens, and enormously creative singers and musicians who kept the town going at full blast at all hours of the day and night. It was a place of riverboatmen, railroad workers, cargo handlers and streams of travelers passing through, a city of bright lights, loud music, and wild women — all of which the young Brownie thoroughly enjoyed!

The year Brownie turned eighteen, Duke Ellington composed and recorded a song called “It Don’t Mean a Thing If It Ain’t Got That Swing,” and the period of the great swing bands began — the era of Ellington, Count Basie, Lionel Hampton, and Benny Goodman’s integrated band (with white and black musicians playing side by side). St. Louis was one of the places where this music grew and flourished, and Brownie became the m.c. at a popular nightclub there, hearing all the famous singers and

musicians at first hand, and introducing their sets — exciting and creative people whom he would in later years see treated as the great classical, legendary figures of American music on national television.

The big band era was a marvelous period in this country's music, and Brownie was in one of the nightclubs where the top groups came to play. In one row would be the massed brass, trumpets punching out the high notes with seemingly effortless, gliding ease, and trombones adding their deep resonance to the new, sophisticated harmonies, with lights flashing off their golden bells through the blue haze of drifting cigarette smoke. In another row, the mellow tones of a line of saxophones playing counterpoint, the drummer driving the beat in flowing, constantly shifting rhythmic patterns. The men in the nightclub leaned back confidently in their expensive suits, big gold rings catching the glitter of the stage lights in front of them. The women moved their hands elegantly as they talked, sleek and svelte and sensuously seductive, glistening satin gowns form-fitted to their curves, the sheen of their glossy hair shifting as they turned their heads.

Laughter filled the air as the drinks were delivered to the tables. The 1920's, and even the 1930's, was an era when people went out at night *to have fun* — they wanted to hear upbeat songs like “Blue Skies,” “Let a Smile Be Your Umbrella,” “Button Up Your Overcoat,” “Stardust,” “Singing in the Rain,” and “I Got Rhythm.” And at first, that was what Brownie did: he had fun being part of it all.

In September of 1938, Brownie married Evelyn Rogers there in St. Louis. He was twenty-four years old himself. He did not let being married keep him from the nightclub scene.

I like to start off saying, I really don't think that I was an alcoholic when I first started drinking. Now a lot of people say that they was an alcoholic when they *first started* drinking. Well, I don't know about you, but I don't think I was. I think I had to go into different channels to become an alcoholic. I probably had a tendency to become an alcoholic. But I really don't think I was. I think I went along, as times [changed], and [went into] different channels, and become this alcoholic.



Brownie (Harold Brown) — portrait hanging on the wall of the t.A.A. meeting place he founded called "Brownies," where people still make annual pilgrimages from all over the upper Midwest.

Because I wants to be believed, but I were a amateur drinker when I first started drinking. It was because I used to giggle at everything; I used to get half-high and I would giggle. And I don't think alcohol to me, at that time, was a problem to me. I used to just like to laugh. People say



something funny, and I would just bust out in this laugh, and just fall out on the floor just laughing. You know, because I don't know why I got so tickled over what they said.



Brownie (Harold Brown)

But as time marches on, I went into another channel, of a social drinker. Now I used to drink it, or leave it alone. I once were the master of ceremony at a [St. Louis] nightclub. I have set down and talk with Billy Eckstein — King Kong — just like I'm talking with you. And I don't think I'se [doing more than] social drinking. I talk with some of the big people today that I see on television, that they used to sponsor into [that] nightclub.

And I used to introduce them, master of ceremony. They might [talk with me first, and then I get up and say] what I'm supposed to say, and get peoples in the spirit.

And ask them, “Was they all happy?” Naturally they were, ‘cause they were drinking, they say, “Yeah.” And I said, “Well, just let us get together,” and we did.

But, getting together, as years passed on — and continue drinking — I think I went into another channel, of a heavy drinker. Now, yes, I got drunk doing my heavy drinking, but I always could remember what happened, the next day. I used to fall down and couldn’t get up again — I knowed I was down. But yet I could not help myself.

There was a statistic that Ken Merrill, the factory owner who was the founder of A.A. in South Bend, gave back in 1944 in one of his early radio broadcasts there: only one drinker in two hundred is an alcoholic.<sup>48</sup> That was typical of the very low figures given at that time. Here in 2017, almost seventy-five years later, the official U.S. government figures are much higher: “26.9 percent of people ages 18 or older reported that they engaged in binge drinking in the past month.” 6.2% of adults aged 18 or older can be diagnosed as alcoholics.<sup>49</sup>

The calculated percentage of alcoholics was so low in those earlier estimates from the 1940’s and 50’s because when researchers looked at drinkers who had reached the stage which Brownie had arrived at by the period he was describing here, they classified them as “heavy drinkers” but not yet “alcoholics.” Brownie was regularly drinking so much that he would collapse and fall down, unable to get back up on his feet again no matter how hard he tried, but that was not considered alcoholism by the standards of that period in American history.<sup>50</sup> That was just partying and having a good time. You were not accepted into A.A. at all until you were practically in the last stages of the disease, and only then if you could convince the A.A. people right away — not only by your

words but by your *actions* — that you were literally willing to do anything necessary to be freed from your drinking.

But since alcoholism is a progressive disease it has been recognized in more recent years, that there are clearly definable symptoms that allow alcoholics to be positively and unequivocally identified long before they get to that sad stage. A more modern definition of the kind of alcoholism that has become a serious problem (used by the founders of the Lackland Model of alcoholism treatment in 1953) would be:<sup>51</sup>

A patient suffers from chronic alcoholism if he uses alcohol to such an extent that it interferes with a successful life (including physical, personality, and social aspects), and he is either not able to recognize this effect, or is not able to control his alcohol consumption although he knows its disastrous results.

When Brownie was continually getting falling-down drunk on a regular basis, as he described at this point, he was already clearly a chronic alcoholic by that definition. “Physical, personality, and social aspects” were already obviously involved. And Alcoholics Anonymous is also better known today to the public at large, and a larger segment of the general population is aware that alcoholism is a disease, not just a morally condemnable absence of self-control and will-power, which also makes us more willing to recognize alcoholic behavior at an earlier stage in its development.

But the great problem in dealing with alcoholism is *denial* in the early stages. It is a disease that makes you think you do not have a disease. It affects the higher judgment centers of the brain in such a way that it is very difficult for early-stage alcoholics to realize the actual degree of their impairment, or the out-of-control behavior that is already being exhibited at least on occasion.

So most people in A.A. in northern Indiana today would say that Brownie was already clearly an alcoholic at that point, but it is also clear, that even if he could have been persuaded to attend a few A.A. meetings, there is a great chance that he would still have gone back to drinking again, until he had had so many bad experiences that — *if* he survived them — even he could no longer deny that he had a life-threatening problem.

But since alcoholism is a progressive disease, Brownie's drinking kept on getting worse and worse until he eventually inevitably hit the point where, even by the standards of the 1930's and 1940's, he was undoubtedly an alcoholic:

When as time marches on, I went into I guess the last stage beyond an amateur drinker, social drinker, heavy drinker, into I guess a alcoholic. I used to say, "Man, did we have a good time last night? Where was I?" Didn't even know where I was at! My drinking kept picking up.

If the Mississippi river was famous in the old days for its paddlewheel river boats and its black jazz musicians, it was equally well known for the figure of the smooth-talking riverboat gambler and card sharp. Brownie worked out a slightly modernized version of the latter right there in the rip-roaring night spots of St. Louis, to support himself and his long-suffering wife Evelyn and their children.

Now, being the master of ceremonies at [that] nightclub, my job, I used to gamble a whole lot. I never did have a job [at all, in fact, in the usual sense]. Really, most of my job was gambling all the time for my living. I raised my family on gambling.

Now, individual tell me that he's a gambler, and broke all the time. Some gambler! Hey you! A gambler don't get

broke. Because, what I had to put down on you, I couldn't afford to get broke. Because I would put down three-dice combination on you in a minute.

Now, sometimes it'd take two of us to do this, or sometimes it'd take three to do it. We always running in a pair to put down this game. Now, I may come into a game first, and my friend come in maybe about a half an hour after I been in there. He [pretend he] knows nothing about me. We cut to one another, just the same I would do somebody else in there. But yet we well knows one another. And when the betting *start off*, then that's when we'll *start in*.

Now, if I let him win, he'll go, or I'll win. We understand who, [and] which one's gonna win the money. Now, I may bet against him, and he would fade anybody around the table. Well, my little money I had paid in, he bet you I hit, and "I bet I win," and "I bet you don't." And when he pass [*Brownie chuckled gleefully*] he picks up all the money around the table, and my little bit.

This thing kept rocking on, steady drinking. Now a gambler's not a happy type of an individual. I didn't care for friends, I didn't care too much for friendship. I wasn't particular about you liking me too well. It was because you may be my next victim. So I didn't have time for friends. In other words, friendship costs too much anyhow. Always got to *give* something when you've got friends. So I wasn't particular about friends. They always want favors.

That thing kept up, and at that time I run an alcoholic water joint we call it. And at that time [in the wee hours of the morning], the red light districts was off, in which the girls and things, when they get off [their night's work], they always used to flock to my place, because I would stay open practically all night. Only thing we had in there was a piano player and to sell that booze.

I kept on drinking, and drinking. Drinking kept picking up. I was getting to the place where I couldn't gamble too good. For the cards and things, the dice and things, would all go together.

Well, it's a dangerous job gambling, because you liable to get killed at that game any time. 'Cause people think they can just get in you — something for nothing.

It is interesting to note that, as a professional con man and gambler, Brownie was not particularly worried about being shot by one of the marks whose money he had taken. A professional con man knows how to choose the right marks, and when to get up and leave. What Brownie was concerned about was someone else, perhaps just standing around and watching, who would notice Brownie going off with a wad of money in his pocket, and would decide that the quickest and simplest way to make money gambling was to kill and rob the winner on his way home.

And in addition to the inherent dangers of having people know that he was carrying that much cash in that particular environment, the alcohol abuse was muddling *his mind* — the tool he used to pull off his cons and then get away successfully. From the way Brownie tells part of the tale, it may also be strongly suspected that his wife Evelyn was making it very clear to him that she was not at all happy with what he was doing, and that it was high time for him to go get an honest job and quit flirting with death.

So Brownie pulled a standard alcoholic ploy: he pretended to acquiesce to her demands, and tried to set up a job hunt which would look good (at least to her) but where the chances of actually having to work for a living like ordinary people were (he thought) practically nonexistent. And, of course, in typical alcoholic fashion, he did all this with a good deal of moral posturing!

I went home one night and I told my wife that I was going to get a job, and I was gonna quit doing what I was doing, and I'm going to take care of you and the kids better than what I'm doing. I'm gonna take some of this worry off your mind. And I'm going to get me a job.

Now my intentions was good. I went to the American Steel Polity, and just to see would they hire me. At that time, they used to have you all standing out. You didn't have to fill out no application, they'd just look through the crowd and pick you out, "Say, boy, come here," anywhere, "Come a here, I can use you." Now I wasn't particular about 'em calling me, but I just wanted my wife knew I went there.

And I was the first one, he looked over and say, "Hey, come here"! [*Laughter*] I went with the work.

So there Brownie was, like many an alcoholic both before and since, trapped by his own attempt to make it look like he was actually going to reform his life on his own. So what he had to do was to put his mind to work to try to devise some way of turning this unfortunate circumstance — having an honest job — into some way that he could get a large amount of money without having to work for it. The problem was that by this time the alcohol had befuddled his brain so badly (A.A. people find that it takes several months of complete abstinence before "the fog starts to lift") that the scheme Brownie formulated was quite literally totally insane.

Now I worked there for a little while, not too long. And I got tired working, because this wasn't the type of work I choose to do, because it was dirty, greasy: sand, and all that stuff. And I knew that I could do me better than this.

So I don't know what thought came in my mind to do what I done. That night I came home, and the next night I had to go back to work, and it was bothering me to go back to work, so I got about half drunk, and I told my wife, I says "Now, I'm going to tell you something. If someone come here and tell you about me, don't you get alarmed. If the police come here, whatever he say, don't you get alarmed." She said, "Well what you going to do?" I said, "I'm not going to do anything, just don't you worry."

With this stupid, rubber-base mind that I had, I went over there. We's bringing sand out of the foundry. And I was the guy was a supposed to uncouple the box car, then give the signal to take it away. This train brought it out. I stuck my fingers up under the box wheel and cut both of my fingers off. That one, and this un; they sewed that one back on. And I was in the dark, I didn't know if this was off completely or not but I done like that, and I found this was hitting back and forth, and I said, "Yeah, she's off."

I tore out and begin to run — for the doctor, because I didn't want to die. They alls are a going, "What's the trouble?" I said, "Finger off." And they was running behind me with the stretcher, hollering about "Wait, and lay down on the stretcher," and I said to myself, "Why in the hell am I going to wait for 'em? I'm in front! Catch up with me! If you look like you going faster 'n me then I'll lay on the stretcher!" [*Laughter*]

Well, I got there to the doctor, and he was out to lunch. And they buzzed him to come in there, so he rushed in there right quick, and he gave me a shot in the arm. Now I'm pretty well loaded anyhow, drunk. Any[way] I don't feel too much. I'm looking at him, you know, and all this raw meat, and the bone sticking up, you know. But you know what I was really thinking? — when he was sewing on the thing, and fooling around, and fumbling with it? I wasn't thinking about the finger so much, I was thinking about how



much insurance I was gone get. [Laughter] How much money was they gone pay me for losing both fingers?

Those who are not in the A.A. program may wonder at what seems the total grotesqueness of an audience laughing heartily with someone who was involved in such a horrendous deed. But the second of the Twelve Promises in A.A. says clearly that we will eventually get to the point in recovery where “we will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.”<sup>52</sup> A.A. takes people who are afraid of life, afraid of living, afraid of other people, afraid of themselves, and *turns them into people of such extraordinary courage that they can actually laugh at their own most tragic misadventures.*

Brownie also introduces, at this point in his lead, a theme that will recur at various points further along. In some sick, perverse way, practicing alcoholics actually WANT to suffer pain. They are self-destructive people who actively seek out destructive environments and relationships. At best, they feel an almost instant panic when their lives start going well and they start to feel real pleasure. At a more serious level, they consciously flirt with death and extreme bodily injury. At worst, they deliberately harm their bodies, do crazy things to inflict physical pain on themselves, even mutilate themselves, and at the final end of it all, commit suicide. A large percentage of suicides are discovered, on autopsy, to have elevated blood alcohol levels. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among alcoholics.

Deliberately cutting your own fingers off “to get the insurance money” is a totally *insane* act. But that is what the disease does to the brain. That is why, in the second step, we beg for the help of some Power which “could restore us to sanity.”

Going under the anesthetic was a terrifying experience for Brownie, like a hippy from the 1960's having a "bad trip" on a hallucinogen like LSD. Alcoholics are fear-driven, with the fears rooted down into the lowest levels of the subconscious, some of them going all the way back into the pre-Freudian period of earliest infancy. For Brownie, the anesthetic liberated these primordial fears in the form of nightmare images. The alcoholic who drinks long enough will meet these, sooner or later.

There is an old A.A. saying, that the formal religiosity of the churches is for people "who are afraid of going to hell," but the spiritual life of A.A. is for people "who have already been there." This is not a rhetorical exaggeration — what the alcoholic eventually experiences *is* the hell of the churches' teachings. It is the demons of that hell, into whose hands he or she falls, and the pain is infinitely worse than anything that can even remotely be imagined by those who have never experienced it. The pain and terror goes on to the point where the alcoholic feels his mind breaking apart, where it is clear that his mind could not stand any more pain. And then it nevertheless continues.

They didn't do the operation right this morning [when it happened.] They had to put me to sleep where they could really cut it and saw it off.

At that time they didn't have the stuff that they got now to put you to sleep. They had *ether*. And they put this cap over my nose, and told me to take a deep breath and inhale it. And I said to myself, "I ain't gone go to sleep, I don't give a damn what they do."

But you know, if an individual die, like [just at the moment when] he go under ether, he dies a horrible death. Now I know that most of this was because I had this alcohol in me, or what. But boy, with this alcohol and ether —

man, you got yourself something, believe me when I tell you that! Seemed like the world had turned bottom side upwards. And it was dogs and cats was fighting in the air.

Now ether starts swelling your feet first. You feel it come up in your feet. Then it goes up a coming up around your hips here. And boy, when it get up toward this heart, you into something! And don't let nobody tell you, you ain't!

"I want to believe that an alcoholic enjoys suffering," Brownie said in this lead. There is a strong connection between the pain and maiming and destruction which practicing alcoholics bring on themselves, and the even worse pain which they are continually trying to hold down below their conscious level — the hellish experience which the ether liberated in Brownie.

Part of it can be such a deep self-hatred and self-loathing that I want to attack myself viciously: "I am only worthy to be punished, I deserve to suffer pain, I am a bad person who must pay the penalty for being what he is."

But the pain which alcoholics court and bring on themselves is also partly to distract themselves from the even more horrifying feelings and thoughts and memories they spend every day trying to keep from feeling and thinking about. A psychiatric nurse was horrified when she discovered that one of her male patients (an alcoholic and addict) had his penis completely covered with tattoos. "How could he stand the incredible pain?" she asked. Well, it kept his mind off the swirling thoughts in his head that hurt so much worse.

And they put me to sleep, and I was a sick man the next morning behind that ether. And if they were using ether in here I could tell you. Wherever I go, I smell it, I can tell

you if it's ether or not. Once you've been under ether, you never forget that smell.

So the next morning my wife, my cousins, and some of the alkie that I drank with came over to Granite City, Illinois, where the hospital I was in [was situated, over on the other side of the Mississippi river from St. Louis], and brought a half a pint, well! And when they brought this half a pint, I was sick. But I didn't want the nurse to see this half pint.

You see, *alcohol to an alcoholic is his best friend*. Bestest friend he got when he become an alcoholic. He likes to know that he got more for the next day. And if [a recovering alcoholic] ever go back to drinking, he gets soon back up [to drinking just as bad as he was before he got sober].

I remember hearing a guy said, and I think he told the truth — just a alcoholic, but he wasn't on the A.A. program; he was just talking, and we was in the barbershop, and he had a half a pint in this pocket — and he said, "I love my wife and kids . . . ." He says, "No, now let me take that back." He said, "I love my whiskey first, *then* I love my wife and my kids." And I think that is the truth. I think alcoholics love they drinking better than they do they family.

It is because they drinks for everything. They drinks if it's wintertime to keep [warm]. Summer he drinks to keep cool. If somebody die in the family, he drinks for that. If somebody gets married he drinks for that. And if he lose his job he drinks for that. And if he get a good job, he still drinks for that! So he drinks to everything. So *alcohol, to an alcoholic, is his best friend*.

Well, . . . he brought that half a pint to me, over there in Granite City, Illinois, and I was pretty sick from that ether. But do you know, [lying in that hospital bed, that alcohol] there is the only thing — with all the fine food they brought

me to eat . . . I couldn't keep it on my stomach — the alcohol was the only thing I could keep on my stomach. It was because I had become allergic to alcohol. It would stay when nothing else wouldn't stay. I wanted to drink when I couldn't eat.

You know, it's a funny thing about an alcoholic, if he would eat some food, or whatever his favorite food was, and made him sick, he'd never eat it no more. But alcohol makes him sick all the time, and he go right back to drinking.

*I want to believe that an alcoholic enjoys suffering.* It's because he suffers a many years to get this A.A. program. I'se drinking for thirty long years, or better, before I found this way of life, of Alcoholics Anonymous. Yes, till I get to the place where that I want to quit drinking, and seemed like I could quit.

Another theme that Brownie hit repeatedly in his lead, was that moralistic preaching about alcoholics being able to quit if they just used their will-power, was nothing but nonsense. The twelve steps of A.A. began with the simple, blunt statement, "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol."

The moralizers and the alcoholics who are still in denial are often in neurotic collusion with one another, for the alcoholics who are still out there drinking want desperately to believe that by just being a little more careful, or using a little more self-control, or developing a more effective drinking strategy, they could avoid all the unpleasant consequences of their compulsive drinking.

And the moralizers can pat themselves on the back with self-righteous satisfaction as they tell the alcoholic, in their pompous, smug fashion, that he needs to start using some "will-power," but they do not in fact guide him in any workable way towards

sobriety. They are like the Pharisees in the New Testament, who heap even weightier burdens on other men's backs, and do not lift one finger to actually help them<sup>53</sup> (Pharisee was a contemptuous term used by ordinary people of that time to refer to some of the little rigid, puritanical, hypermoralistic religious cults which had developed in first-century Palestine). People of this sort have fun scolding alcoholics, but they have no useful information for them about how they might actually go about treating their destructive illness.

As Brownie's drinking grew worse and worse, the moralists progressively got more and more enjoyment from preaching their will-power sermon at him:

Now people used to tell me that, "Use your will-power." Well, alcoholics don't have no will-power! He have *will*, but not no *power*! The judge said that "if you drink, the next time, I'm going to send you up." *I will drink*. Say that "if you do this, then I'm going to do this to you." I will do that.

But power, no. He don't have any power. Got a lot of will, yes, he have a lot of will!

So, I got so bad in my drinking . . . me and my wife was sleeping in the same bed together. I would get to running in the bed, run all up and down her back and all that stuff, running from something, I don't know what I was doing, I must 've been into [delirium] or something. I would get up at night, thinking I'm going to the bathroom, and would go to the corner, and do all my business in the corner. I would pull the drawers off [the dresser and chest of drawers], and wet a pile of clothes, then go back and get back in the bed.

The next morning I'd get up, my wife say, "Well, whuh . . . ?" I say, well, I asked her, "What these clothes doing wet? I do what?" She say, "You don't mean nobody

getting up here at night, and putting all this water, and doing all this stuff in these drawers, and pull these out?" I say, "Naw." So I kept doing that, and I was ashamed of myself for doing these things.

Regardless of any surface attempts to shrug it off, *the alcoholic is already deeply ashamed of his behavior*. But the moralists who preach will-power to the alcoholic are in fact almost as sick — perhaps even sicker — than he is. They deal with their own deep fear of being shamed by trying to heap shame on other people's heads first. Then they can say to themselves, "Well, but you see, I'm not like that alcoholic. So I AM TOO a good person." But there's an old folk saying: "A woman who has to *say* she's a lady, ain't." People who have to prove to themselves continually that they are O.K. by heaping shame on the heads of poor people who are already overwhelmed with shame and self-loathing, are most definitely not O.K. themselves.

But the alcoholics, on *their* side, are so deeply ashamed of their own behavior, that they cannot admit even to themselves how humiliated they are and how guilty they feel over what they have done, and what they have failed to do. So they turn to the same self-medication they turn to every time they have feelings that overwhelm them: they ultimately drink even more heavily after every scolding, every rejection, to try to avoid feeling this additional weight of shame and self-loathing. So the problem keeps on getting worse and worse, and one by one, every person who used to love them has to start moving away from them, *to save their own lives*.

So, it was [my wife Evelyn's] birthday or Christmas, or something, I don't know exactly what it was, and I asked

her what does she want for Christmas, or the birthday, or whatever it may be, and she said “Twin beds.” [*Laughter*] I said, “Well, you got your wish.” So I bought twin beds, and I thought twin beds was better anyhow, because [*Brownie chuckled*] I could have the whole bed to myself!

The beds cost me a hundred and ten dollars apiece. I bought those chrome beds, with the chrome head and a red back seam in the middle of it, because I think that’s what it needed, kind of a chrome-steel like. Because the way I would tear up a bed was something else! And if I fall, I wouldn’t have to fall too far, just right on the floor, and that’s where I would make my home.

And although Brownie was married, with children, there were other women involved too. Alcoholics seem to almost invariably have some sort of sexual dysfunction or problem along with their compulsive drinking. Most commonly it is gross promiscuity, but among a large enough collection of alcoholics, you will encounter every sexual problem and aberration in the book.

One male alcoholic in this area —let us call him Toby (not his real name), who now, God be thanked, has been in recovery for a number of years — would insert his penis into an empty light socket, then turn the electric current on when he was compulsively masturbating. When Toby was a small child, he walked into the kitchen and saw his father, who did not know he was there, shoot and kill his mother, then turn the gun on himself and blow out his own brains. The pain of the electrical shock at least distracted him from the far greater pain of the demonic nightmare that dwelt within his own memories, and came out to torment him with the literal pains of hell.

Brownie however had the commonest kind of problem which alcoholics develop in their sex relations, which is gross



promiscuity: married, with children, he was nevertheless a compulsive womanizer. He would pick up a woman in a bar, take her to bed, and then “rock and roll” with her until he passed out. (In old-time black slang to rock and roll meant to have sexual intercourse.)

There is a well-known country-western song whose chorus runs, “The girls all look like movie stars at closing time.” Female alcoholics can tell you that, from the feminine point of view, the reverse can also happen to them, and some totally revolting men can *also* look like movie stars with enough booze blurring your perceptions. Then the alcoholic wakes up in the morning to see a stranger whom he or she could hardly remember picking up, sleeping right there in the same bed.

Seeing the sexual partner in the clear light of morning, and with the mind-numbing alcohol mostly worn off, can often be a real exercise in total self-revulsion for the alcoholic who has gone that route! So Brownie was filled with shame, humiliation, self-revulsion, and self-loathing. When he truly looked at himself, all he could do was break down and cry — a grown man, with bitter, helpless tears rolling down his cheeks — and these intrusions of reality came more and more frequently. But he did not know *how* to quit. And so it was back to the bottle again, the only way he knew to keep from going under totally, from the burden of the overwhelming sense of failure and futility.

Sometimes ready roll all night, then get up — same woman, same clothes, please go on! So this thing kept rocking on, and I would get disgusted. *I was sick and tired of being sick and tired.* I wanted to quit.

Yes, I used to tell people that I can quit when I get ready. But I never was ready!

So it come a time in my life that I was ready. But I didn't have nowhere to go. I didn't know what to do to stop drinking. I joined church. Nothing seemed to help me any. I tried psychiatry. They didn't seem to help me. I tried hospitals. For a while, long as they had me in there, it was all right, but when I got back out, I was the same thing.

I used to get up in the night, in the wee, wee hours, when everything was still. I would get on my knees and pray to God: "God, help me!" I would go out on my back porch — and look up into the skies, where [there was] nothing but the stars, and everything was still, and tears would come out of my eyes — and would ask God, "Is there any help for me?" Because I was beat in every department. I was on my last go 'round. I didn't know what to do.

I prayed, and I had got to the place where that I had got weak like a child, where I couldn't say no. And my friends'd say "Come and have a drink," when I didn't want one. And would go ahead on with 'em and drink. And would come home at night and would cry some more.

Because I was a sick man. Alcohol never lost a battle, and never will. Alcohol don't give a damn who it works on. From the rich to the poor of all creeds. Alcohol is not prejudiced. It work on anybody. If you don't [think it can work on *you* . . . well, if you] fool with it — if you keep fooling with it — it'll let you know. It has killed just as many rich as it is poor. It don't make no difference. "If you fool with me, I'll fool with you," that's alcohol.

Now Brownie was praying to God, and asking for help, but he was still drinking. A.A. says that it is prayer and meditation that gives the alcoholic the real power to stop drinking, so the question is, why did Brownie's prayers not work?

First of all, A.A.'s say that there are really three things involved, and that *all three* are necessary ingredients: (1) God's

grace, (2) participation in the fellowship, and (3) the right kind of effort on the alcoholic's part. You cannot leave one or two of them out and get very far.

The psychiatrists and the hospitals did not work for Brownie, because they tried to heal him without God, using merely human power and human ingenuity. God's grace was the all-powerful master ingredient.

But as Augustine, the great African saint, pointed out centuries ago in his *Confessions*, a good portion of God's grace is commonly mediated to us through the other human beings around us. Ever since Bill W. met Dr. Bob in Akron, Ohio, and the two of them started the A.A. movement, it has been clear that, for the A.A.-type of program to work, it requires at least two alcoholics working the recovery program together. Standing out in your back yard by yourself in the middle of the night, and praying to the midnight sky, is not normally sufficient in and of itself.

The third requirement is also important. It takes only a very small effort on the alcoholic's part, but "faith without works is dead," and it does take *action*, not just words, no matter how many tears and deep feelings accompany these words. A.A. is an action program. And no one whom Brownie encountered *knew what the right actions were*. Prayer itself is not a one-time thing. The true power of prayer can come out only when it becomes a disciplined, daily activity, beginning when you get up in the morning and not finishing till you go to sleep at night, and carried out with patience and long-term perseverance. "Continue, continue, continue," as Raymond Irving told newcomers.

The prayer of the active alcoholic is also not the kind of prayer that allows God to send real help. The alcoholic who is still drinking characteristically prays to God to help him in ways that

the alcoholic has already specified in advance. The alcoholic thinks he already knows exactly what God needs to do here, and what to change there, and how to fix that place, in order to make his life right again. He thinks he is praying, but what he is really doing is standing there lecturing God on how to run the universe! God, on the other hand, knows that the alcoholic's self-prescription will not work, and will never work.

And strangely enough, *God respects us human beings too much to help us when we reject his help*. God refuses to rape the human mind. He respects us more than we usually respect other human beings, and more than we actually respect ourselves. What the practicing alcoholic continues to refuse to do, is to let God set the agenda — to let God help him in a way that God knows will actually work, whether the alcoholic realizes that or not. So out of respect for the human being's personal integrity, no matter how screwy the person's thoughts, God stands back until the person is genuinely willing to accept *help that will work*.

Turning things over to God, and letting God choose the actual treatment plan, takes a certain kind of trust in God, and alcoholics do not want to give that kind of "blind" trust to anyone or anything outside themselves.

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The alcohol was making Brownie increasingly violent. He would get into fights in increasingly crazier situations, even in circumstances in which he had to know that he would end up badly beaten and seriously injured. In his lead, he used the colloquial phrase "I was *feeling evil*" to describe the spirit that would come over him: a rage boiling up inside that wanted to hurt and *to be hurt*. It was a kind of death wish, extremely destructive to anyone who encountered him, but even more *self*-destructive. "I want to

believe that an alcoholic enjoys suffering,” Brownie had said. It was a demonic spirit, the spirit of the Evil One himself, who loves destruction and pain and suffering, and hates anything that is good.

The crazy fights he got into were not that much different from the time he cut off his own fingers. It was insane behavior.

I was coming home once, from a tavern or somewhere, and one police [he tell me to stop and come over to him]. I was half drunk, and *evil* — you know, you can feel sometimes, when *you’re evil* — you want to halfway get into something but nobody want to start nothing, you know. And this police was saying — on Jefferson and Franklin, there in St. Louis, Missouri — [when] I passed him, he said, “*Come here, boy.*”

My whiskey said, “Who in the hell is he talking to?” [Laughter] I kept on walking.

He said, “Come here, boy.” I kept on walking. And he went up behind me and grabbed me in the back of my pants where my belt [is], and that was good as I wanted. He *touched* me!

And flat up the side of his head, I had business, you know. And I knocked him all down, and was kicking him and was going on, but whiskey say, “Kick him some more,” and I was kicking him. And he was trying to get his pistol out, and I was kicking his hand, he couldn’t get his pistol. And there was this bank, has these iron gates across — they locks that up at night to keep you from getting to the main doors, or you have some trouble [getting through ’em, if you trying to break into the bank] — me and him was rattling that gate together, you know.

But when I come to, I don’t know where the *rest* of them police come from! [Laughter] When I come to, I was in Beale Street Station on the floor, with the hickies so high on my head, that you couldn’t hardly touch it with just your

cotton. They wouldn't let none of my people see me. I thought that I was fighting *one* police — I was fighting a whole *gang* of police! [*Laughter*]

Well, I got tired of that too. I said, "Well, they all knows me downtown." They was sometimes afraid to come that way, 'cause when they come after me, they knowed they had trouble on their hands, you know. And I didn't mind going to jail. Or, sometimes it was better that they put me in jail. 'Cause maybe I get killed out there in the street.

Like many other alcoholics who had little money, the jail had become for him the poor man's sanitarium. He had become so frightened of himself, that sometimes he *wanted* to be restrained, to be locked up where he could no longer hurt himself.

At some point in the mid-1940's, Brownie got a civil service job, working for the government. It may have been as a security guard of some sort, because Submarine Bill remembers Brownie telling him that he carried a gun as part of the job. One day, Brownie told Bill, he got furiously angry at a fellow employee, yanked out his gun, pointed it at the other man, and pulled the trigger. Only the fact that the gun misfired and did not go off, kept Brownie from becoming a murderer. God was watching out for him. No human being on earth could have realized at that point that Brownie was going to be the agent through whom God was going to save many other human beings' lives, but God knew, and saved him.

This act of God's grace and compassion did not turn Brownie's life around, and stop him from drinking. Alcoholics who are still drinking frequently keep a mental score card of "wrongs" they believe God has done them, but they never keep a score card for God's many acts of mercy and generosity, no matter how extraordinary the thing which occurred, or show any *gratitude* for

these kindnesses. This is why learning how to feel gratitude is such an important part of the A.A. program for healing sick souls.

I had got a job working for the government in civil service. And I had worked for them a while. But you know, working for the government, and you're an alcoholic, you into something! It is because all government people stick together. If we give a party, just the government people, we throw the party between the government people.

Now my captain that I worked for, Captain Crowley, today when I look back, I can say that he was alcoholic. I don't know why the man likin'ed me so well. Every party was given in the government in that area, I had to be the bartender. And it's the wrong thing, a making me bartender, 'cause man, I would come out from behind that bar, and get with 'em. I'd be on that floor! Soon as someone tend the bar, I be out there where the rest of 'em at. Well, Captain Crowley didn't know, 'cause he was drunk himself. He didn't know what was happening.

"An alcoholic enjoys suffering," Brownie stated. His need to self-destruct was so great, that when nothing else worked, he simply quit that guaranteed civil service job, and left St. Louis. He decided to try what A.A. people call the "geographical cure," a fool's quest that never succeeds. If I move someplace else, an alcoholic decides, into a totally different environment, then I will be freed from the temptations that surround me here, I will be able to make a fresh start, and I will be able to repair some of the damage. But if I am an alcoholic, the real problem is not anything external at all, it is *myself*. That is the one thing I cannot help taking with me, even if I travel to the opposite side of the globe. And since it is a progressive disease, things do not get better after I am in that new place, they just keep on getting worse.



## Racial problems in South Bend, Brownie's next stop

Brownie left St. Louis in 1947 (where ironically the first black A.A. group in the United States had already been created, unknown to him) and eventually came, by way of Chicago, to a Chicago suburb called South Bend. There had been serious racial and religious violence in that latter town only 24 years earlier.

In 1923, the black owner of a soda fountain in South Bend got a letter from the Ku Klux Klan saying that they were going to lynch a black man who was currently being held in the South Bend city jail, and threatening harm to the rest of the local black population. Over a thousand black people, fearing for their lives, fled the city.

In the next year, in 1924, the Ku Klux Klan tried to stage a major parade in South Bend. Now the Klan was not only anti-black but also hated Jews and Roman Catholics. So students at Notre Dame, the Catholic university on the north side of town, came into South Bend and started attacking Klan members and tearing off their robes. Several hundred students gathered at the local Klan headquarters at 230 S. Michigan St., right in the heart of downtown, and started throwing rocks and smashing windows. The Klan parade soon disintegrated.<sup>54</sup>

And as late as 1949 (after Brownie had already come to live in South Bend) when the legendary black jazz musician Lionel Hampton was scheduled to give a concert at the Palais Royale in downtown South Bend, the planners were told that this would have to be a blacks only event. When Hampton threatened to call for a boycott by all the major nationally known musicians, the grudging decision was made to allow white people as well as black people to sit in the audience.<sup>55</sup>





## CHAPTER 13

### **Brownie: Down and Out in South Bend, Indiana**

Brownie quit his civil service job in St. Louis in 1947 — he simply walked away from all of its lifetime guarantees — left town, and finally ended up (via a brief stay in Chicago itself) in the Chicago suburb of South Bend, across the state line in Indiana. The Big Book had been published in 1939, but almost no one knew about it until the Jack Alexander article on A.A. in the *Saturday Evening Post* came out in 1941. And even by the late 1940's, there was nothing remotely like the general and widespread recognition of the A.A. program which exists in the United States today. Little groups were already spreading all around the country, but they were still extremely small, mostly meeting in people's houses, and it was an "underground movement" to an even greater extent than today. Most people did not even know of its existence.

There was potential help for Brownie, but it was going to take a special act of God's grace for him to be put into contact with it. Presumably God, in his loving providence, knew that it was not the right time yet, that Brownie was a hard nut indeed, who would take more than he had experienced so far to crack him. There is an A.A. rule of thumb that never seems to fail: "when the student is ready the teacher will appear." God's providence always seems to

find a way — often through some route that we never, ever would have expected. But it does no good to just be *talking* “ready,” the students must genuinely *be ready* deep in their hearts. So we must assume that, at some deep level, God must have known that Brownie was really and truly not ready yet to genuinely let go and let God do the work. Tough and stubborn character that Brownie was, he had to sink even deeper yet before he would hit *his* bottom.

His wife Evelyn left him. It seems clear that in fact she still loved him and cared for him, but there comes a point when even the alcoholic’s nearest and dearest *have* to leave, in order to save themselves. The rage and violence and sheer insanity which Brownie created at home had become unbearable.

I kept on drinking, I didn’t know anything about Alcoholics Anonymous, or nothing like that. My wife got sick and tired of me, so she thought she better leave me. My wife left, because I was getting worsen and worsen. And desperate.

I used to come in the house, and run ’em all — kids and everybody — out of the house. Could’ve croaked ’em all, and run ’em all out. Run my mother-in-law out in the street half-naked, and everything. They would call the police, then I want to fight the police, say “Who the hell called you? Nobody called you up here. This is my house.” He say, “Well you’re disturbing the peace.” “Yeah, in my own house.” So they didn’t bother me, so it would kind of quiet down a little bit.

Because at home, the point [was] they all know me. They know that I was overbearing and would fight. Because my whiskey would tell me, “Fight that son of a bitch!” And I would fight if I got whupped.

He fought because, down deep, he *wanted* “to get whipped.” He *wanted* to be beaten up, and hurt, and severely injured. In some totally perverse, demonic, *evil* way, Brownie said, “an alcoholic enjoys suffering.” Whether he was flirting with death as a professional gambler, starting fights with policemen, chopping his own fingers off deliberately on the coupler of a train, or drinking enough to kill himself, Brownie *wanted* to inflict pain on himself, *wanted* to destroy himself. An extraordinary self-loathing and inability to love himself or anybody else, along with overpowering guilt and shame, seemed to have combined with some sort of insane death wish,

But real evil — the demonic itself — can never totally be made sense of. *It is the intrinsic nature of evil to be, at its core, deeply irrational and illogical.* In the symbolism of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all three, Satan is the Father of Lies. All his motivations are dominated by Envy, which makes him the Demon Who Loves Evil, the Demon Who Hates the Good.<sup>56</sup> He is the one who both fears and hates everything that is truly good and beautiful.

In desperation, the one part of Brownie that still faintly wanted to live, decided to try to combine “the geographical cure” with an attempt to get his wife back.

My wife, like I say, left me. She went to Chicago. And I begin to get lonely. I wanted to quit, and she didn’t understand me. I didn’t even understand myself. I thought that I better leave St. Louis and go and try to find her, and maybe I could change my life different in a different city. Aw, I couldn’t change there in St. Louis because I had too doggone many friends. And I thought if I could find someplace else, where I didn’t know anybody, that maybe I could handle [it], or get myself together, and straighten my life out.

And so Brownie simply walked away from the security of his civil service job, and decided to leave St. Louis and go to Chicago. He deluded himself into believing that, if he just moved to a different city, and got his wife back, that things would start going better for him, and he would be able to quit drinking. And he decided to make a major production of it.

His *intentions* were good — to put his life back together, to straighten himself out, to start living differently, to repair his broken relationships — and so, in typical alcoholic fashion, he believed that this was going to automatically make all his *actions* good. With alcoholics, you have a lot of fine-sounding words, and sometimes a few deeds they do to grandstand and look like they are splendid fellows and gals to anyone who is watching them, but then everything falls apart in utter catastrophe once again. And that usually does not take long to happen.

So Brownie's intentions were fine. But his actions simply pushed him deeper towards bottom.

I turned in my resignation, going to leave St. Louis for to go where my wife's at. Well at that time, you could buy a suit, dollar down, dollar a week. I taken five dollars, and got about three suits — dollar down, dollar a week — some shoes, and a hat, with about three dollars. "I'll pay you next week!"

But I was about to leave. I packed up my clothes, and caught the train out of St. Louis to Chicago, saying to myself, "I'm going to change my way of living, and change my life." And when I got on the train, at the Union Station, it was the first time in my whole life that I ever rode a train on the inside. All my trains been on the outside. And on my way to Chicago, my intentions were good. I think all

alcoholics got *good* intentions. But hell, they don't hold water.

And this urge came down on me, when I got in Chicago, for that drink. I couldn't wait, I was nervous, I couldn't be still, and a thought come to me and said, just one *little* one wouldn't hurt nobody. Got over there to the whiskey store, I had business! Got me a half a pint, to get a "bracer." Hadn't seen my wife yet, really hadn't seen nobody in Chicago yet, really — to get around, and know what's happening. But he sold me the half a pint, [so I] run around in the alley, there I had business. I had a habit, to open a bottle, used to shuck it at the bottom, then screw the top off. I have even half bust a bottle. But I believe, that day, if I'd have bust that bottle, I'd have got down there and sucked that whiskey up! [*Laughter*]

And when I got to feeling my Cheerios pretty good, my intentions was to go to 5761 State Street. But my whiskey said "No, don't go there right now, why don't you look around over Chicago for a while?" And with this old money that I had in my pocket, that I hold from retirement, that they hand me down for working for so long for the government, I found out — less than ten minutes time, or fifteen — that I had just as many friends in Chicago in them fifteen or twenty minutes, that I had in St. Louis, born and raised there! [*Laughter*] I was spilling that money, trying to . . . just *playing* with people.

The alcoholic lusts for the *gloria mundi*, the glory and praise and admiration of the world, and *yearns* above all to play the Big Shot and the Know-It-All Expert-on-All-Things. So there Brownie was, flashing his cash, and throwing his life's savings away to impress people who were no more than casual strangers he had met on the street in a strange city.

In fact, anybody with any sense could take one look at him and tell that he was dying of his alcoholism. He had almost totally stopped eating, and his eyes were nothing but hollow holes in a skeletal face. His excuse was that his stomach was rebelling against too much alcohol, but the reality is that anorexia is a closely allied illness (that can often be treated successfully in a twelve-step program), and what the alcoholic often does is to fall into something very close to an anorexic pattern. "I want to believe that an alcoholic enjoys suffering," Brownie had said. When you are hungry, and your stomach is starting to hurt, there can be a perverse sense of power and control over denying yourself food, and deliberately prolonging the pain.

Brownie was in such sad shape that when he finally contacted his wife, she and her relatives reacted in total horror.

But it come time for me to go where my wife was at. I was skinny, my eyes had shrunk back in the back of my head, I was dying from malnutrition. Wouldn't eat, just drink. Maybe sometimes a bowl of chili, but no heavy food, 'cause my stomach wouldn't take it. I was so skinny, until I had to wear suspenders to hold my pants up. When I approached that number, at 5761 State Street, my wife wasn't there at the time, she was staying with a cousin, and when I walked in the door, they was glad to see me, but they looked at me awful funny. And when my wife come home, she said, "My God! Wha . . . What's wrong with you!"

And here I was standing up there. In other words, 'fore I could buck I was going to crying. And why I wanted to cry, this thing would end me — was hollering out, "please, somebody help me." I wanted somebody to help me, I didn't know where to get help at.

But my wife's cousin's husband was a doctor . . . And I thought I would ask [him] to give me a thoroughly exam to

find out what is wrong with me. So when he came in, I said, "Doctor, I'd like to talk to you." His office was in his home . . . he made his runs, he made hospitals and so forth, but he had a office in his home.

He said, "Yes, Brownie." He says, "What can I do for you?" I said, "I'd like for you to give me a thoroughly exam." I said, "I don't want you to say 'Well, he's one of the family, and I'll give you a break.' Don't give me no break. You tell me what's wrong with me, and I'm going to pay you. I want you to act in a way that you never seen me before in your life, that I approached your office." He said, "O.K., well come in my office."

I went in his office, he gave me the blood test, he had me lick out my tongue, and he had me to spit in some tissue, and he looked at the tissue, and he said, "Alcohol is your problem" . . . He said, "Another thing I like to tell you," he said, "anything that you wasn't born with, you can quit." Well that sounded right to me — yeah, it's clear I wasn't born with the bottle.

The physician gave him the standard moralistic sermon: Just quit drinking so much. Use some willpower. The question of whether you are going to pick up a bottle off the table is just a matter of choice, like choosing whether you are going to take the red tie out of your closet this morning and put it on, or the blue one. It sounds so simple and common sense to the non-alcoholic, *because it causes that person no problem.*

This doctor in Chicago told me to quit, Brownie said, "but he didn't tell me *how*." And for the alcoholic, it is the *how* which is the problem. Three years later, Brownie said, "When I found the A.A. program, I could go back and *tell him something.*" Because the A.A. people finally told him *how*.

In northern Indiana today, unfortunately, the courts are sending active alcoholics to A.A. after they have been arrested for some alcohol-related offense, thinking that these meetings will convince large numbers of them that they ought to quit drinking. The A.A. program was never intended to do that, so it is only rarely that this works. A.A. was designed for people who have already realized that they *want* to quit drinking, they *have* to quit drinking — but because they are alcoholics — have also found, to their horror, that no matter how hard they try to stop, they cannot.

Submarine Bill C. tells his pigeons that this is what he calls “the step before the first step: *getting finished*.” A.A. does not do any good for people until they finally “get finished.” Until they reach that point, they will keep on going back out and trying it again. Brownie had begun to hear what the Chicago doctor was trying to tell him — he was about ready to get finished, to become willing to listen to those who would teach him the “how” of quitting. But he wasn’t finished *yet*.

God in his providence made a strange decision then. Brownie, in his life journey, had to do one more thing before he would be ready for the teachers to appear. He had to go to a place he had never, ever dreamed of going in order to hit bottom: South Bend, Indiana. How can we mere human beings know why this odd and unexpected turn of events had to happen first? Was that the only place which had the teachers whom Brownie would actually be willing to hear? Was it because of the great work which God knew only Brownie could accomplish for the suffering alcoholics of that part of northern Indiana? Did Brownie, who prided himself on being a sophisticated city person, moving amid the glittering lights and high style and avant-garde jazz music of giant metropolises like St. Louis and Chicago, need to be given a little more ego-



reduction before he would be amenable to hearing the small still voice of God that speaks within?

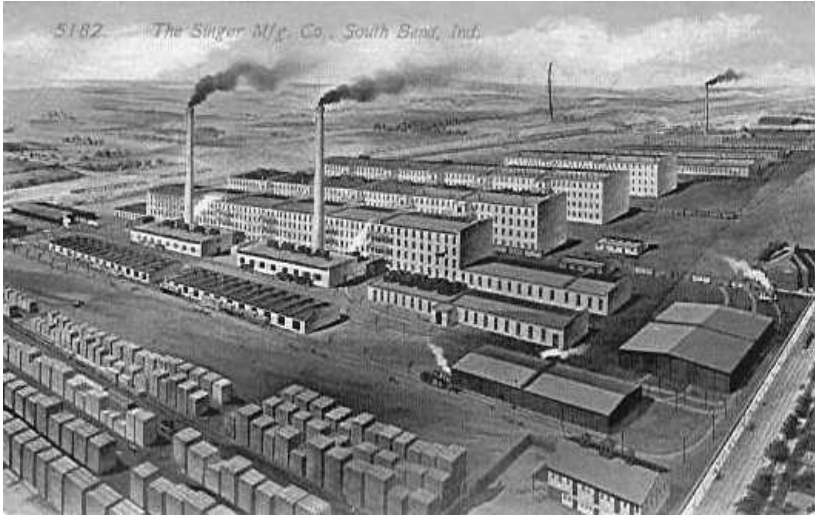


South Bend in those days was a factory town built on the St. Joseph river where it bends northward to flow into Lake Michigan.

God seems to be an “efficiency expert,” who delights in accomplishing several major things simultaneously with a single, unexpected twist of his providence, so perhaps God did it for *all* of these reasons and even more. Who are we human beings ever to figure out everything that God knows, and all God’s reasons for doing anything at all?

At any rate, it was 1947, the year Brownie turned thirty-three, when an odd turn of events put him on the South Shore commuter train (sometimes referred to by the locals, after the old comic strip, as the Toonerville Trolley), whose route passes through the shifting sand dunes and small, stunted trees along the southern shore of Lake Michigan, and then keeps on going east away from the lake, through fertile fields and prosperous farms, dotted with groves of huge oaks and maples (and in those days, elms as well),

and finally terminates in South Bend, Indiana (population a little over 100,000) some ninety miles east of Chicago. In those days, the railroad station for the South Shore was right in the heart of South Bend, with the train running on its tracks like a multi-car streetcar right through the middle of the downtown streets.



There were a number of large factories in South Bend when Brownie first arrived in that city, including the plant (seen here) where the Singer Sewing Machine company built its cabinets.

Brownie was going to spend the next three years there just getting worse, sinking lower and lower into his alcoholism. It was not until 1950 that his wife Evelyn found out about Alcoholics Anonymous, and they discovered that there were two strong and capable black people already in the South Bend group — Bill Hoover and Jimmy Miller — who had two years' sobriety already by this time. But Brownie's initial reaction to South Bend was sheer horror!

I stayed in Chicago for a while. I moved from my wife's cousin's, moved to the Grand Hotel at 51st and South Park Avenue, which was a pretty neighborhood at that time. I didn't have a job. My wife did.

But somehow my aunt got in touch with me. [Somehow she found out] that I was in Chicago, and she wrote me a letter to come to South Bend, that Tom and she could help me, and get me a job, and maybe I could turn out to be a better type fellow.

Now I never seen South Bend before in my life. I probably come through here on a freight train, but I ain't really stopped. I ain't never stopped in no small towns no how, 'cause I had no time for no small towns, you know. All big cities, that's what I liked, where [there are] bright lights and everything's happening. People! everything's going on! You want to go off at four o'clock in the morning, you can go, you know, something's happening all the time.

I said, "All right." My wife walked down to the South Shore [railroad train] with me, and I caught the South Shore coming to South Bend, and when I gotch' here in South Bend and seen these dim lights!!! The people *looked* funny, I couldn't *understand* the people. I just look up aside of a cat's head, you know, wondering what kind of mind, what kind of thought he had, you know. Then it come to me: small towns, small-minded people. Now I thought that she's gone go where some brighter lights 're at — course they got more lights in South Bend than they had twenty-five years ago. 'Cause South Bend used to be a dark place.

Brownie's reaction was amusing. The South Bend/Mishawaka urban complex was not some small town in the corn fields, but a fairly good sized industrial center. And there Brownie was, with his heavy southern border state dialect, walking through a town

where the people speak the purest Standard American pronunciation in the country — the model followed in all American dictionaries, and for those who speak on radio, stage and television. But Brownie thought *they* talked funny!



The best known factory in South Bend was the plant where the famous Studebaker automobiles were built. This photo is of the stylistically innovative 1950 model, manufactured at the time Brownie got sober in South Bend. In an earlier era, the Studebaker company had built most of the covered wagons used for settling the American west.

There were no nightclubs in South Bend like the ones Brownie had frequented in St. Louis, but the people in A.A. could have told him that there was more than enough sin going on in that city for Brownie to handle in the shape he was in by that point! One especially famous bordello in South Bend for many years was run by a woman called Mama Chickie. According to oft repeated legend, when she finally retired, a great banquet was held in a big, formal hall, with the mayor, ex-mayors, the police chief, ex-police chiefs, and a whole host of major government officials and city leaders present to wish her well. It is said that, when Mama Chickie was called to the microphone (after various speeches had

been given by other people praising her) with the request to say a little bit herself, that her remarks began with the words, “Well, it’s certainly wonderful to see so many of my old friends here!”

During the Prohibition period, according to old timer Frank Nyikos (whose father owned a bar on Chapin Street), those who sold illegal alcohol kept it in secret places such as tanks hidden inside ceilings and walls. In one establishment, Frank said, the proprietor unscrewed a light bulb from a ceiling fixture and pulled out a cork to dispense the whiskey he had produced in his illicit still. In another, there was a faucet over a sink, cleverly constructed so that when the handle was turned in one direction, water came out, but when it was turned in the opposite direction, alcohol poured forth. It was a city which was always famed for its extraordinarily competent and inventive machinists and metal workers!

But to Brownie, South Bend and Mishawaka were nothing but backwards, cold, and DARK. He thought he was in the worst possible combination of the scenes from the black-and-white section at the beginning of *The Wizard of Oz* (where Dorothy is living in the isolated farm house in the middle of the flat, dry, barren prairies – in the movie this is supposed to be in Kansas — before she arrives in the magical land of Oz and it changes to Technicolor), and the Eliza-crossing-the-ice scene from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (the nightmarish episode where the only way Eliza can escape from the slave owners is to cross the half-frozen Ohio river by jumping from one floating ice floe to another, with the slabs of ice tipping under her feet and threatening to dump her in the frigid river).

And my aunt put me in the car, and she kept riding and riding and riding — and kept on riding — and rode out

where there wasn't no lights, in the country. Now I wasn't used to no country. And it was dead wintertime. "My God! Man!" I say, "I can't stay here." There's a house way over there, and one way over there, and ice was on the trees, and they was cracking, and sound like tigers and lions out there. She had a farm out there or something. Pigs hollering! *[Laughter]*

I said, "Aunt . . ." — no, I asked my uncle — I said "Where's the nearest whiskey bootleg place around here?" He said, "Up that road." I said, "Let's chevy up there for a few minutes."

Carry me up and I got a pint. I came back home, and [was] drinking that pint in my room, and for the first time in my whole life, I think that's when I went into my first d.t.'s. I begin to bite on the pillow like a dog, then bark like a dog. The next morning my aunt asked me, she said, "Boy, what was wrong witch' you?" And I told her it was something I ate. But that alcohol had me in there. And God in heaven knows, I wanted help from somewhere.

I told my aunt I couldn't stay here. I got to move up town, where [there were] people. So she moved me up town. And when she moved me up town, I had to find a room of my own, and I went to a place where it was all men staying, no womens at all. And I asked this lady if she have a room, and she say, "Yeah." She say, "You like to see it?" I say, "Yeah." This woman carried me up in her attic. No partition, winter old weather, and put me a little bucket up there for me to urinate in.

The next morning, it was cold. I went to breathe, and couldn't breathe. Both of my sides were beginning to hurt. I broke down and begin to cry again, asking God, "Was there any help for me?" Didn't know anything about Alcoholics Anonymous yet.

My wife came . . . from Chicago, . . . thought she better come over here and help me, because if she didn't, wouldn't

be long, I'll be dead. I had got down with the double pneumonia, where I was spitting up blood.

My wife moved me out of there, into another place down the street . . . , and she asked, "Did they have a room for my husband? And she said, "Yeah." This woman takened me in, as a son. She pulled all of my clothes off, put some kind of big weed, or some kind of weed smelled like mint, or something, around my sides. I said, " . . . don't look like this going to work." I said, "What is the best doctor you have in this town?" . . . . I said, "Call him up, 'cause it doesn't look like I'm going to make it."

Poor Brownie must have felt for sure that he had left civilization far behind. He had ended up with pneumonia, and found himself being treated by a primitive herb woman (pronounced "yarb" woman) who mixed ancient folk remedies from the Europe and Africa of centuries ago with, almost certainly, a little bit of innocent, mild witchcraft.

Brownie's thoughts turned deeply morbid at this point. His death wish did not seem nearly so attractive, now that he felt himself actually staring death in the face, with a kind-hearted but totally pre-scientific conjure woman putting wet weeds on his chest while muttering charms against chest congestion.

I begin to think about my family, my mother, my sisters and brothers — and I came out of a very nice family, a very religious family. I never seen my mother or father take a drink in their life. But I turn out to be one of those alcoholics — me and my brother — which I buried my brother this year, from alcoholism. He weighed a hundred and eighty pounds when he was living, when he died he weighed one hundred pounds. I doubt if he weighed that when they put him in the casket, me looking down at him.

Brownie finally realized that *he wanted to live*. This is one of the most significant decisions that an alcoholic has to make. “I want to believe that an alcoholic enjoys suffering,” Brownie said, but it is an even darker urge than that. There is a kind of a perverse death wish at work in the alcoholic’s soul. Alcoholics can know full well that they are killing themselves with their drinking, and *not even care*.

During the first months of recovery in the A.A. program, and sometimes even beyond, the death wish is still so strong, and the will to live is still so weak, that these recovering alcoholics must be given repeated doses, again and again, of the two great medicines against that kind of fatal death wish: LOVE and HOPE. But before either of these powerful medicines can work, these alcoholics must first make one fundamental choice themselves: they must decide that *they want to live*.

Sick and miserable, frightened and obsessed by morbid thoughts and images, Brownie crossed that divide. He wanted to live. He asked his wife to call a real doctor, and this doctor told him the same fundamental thing that the Chicago doctor had — his real problem was the alcohol, the pneumonia had just been an opportunistic invasion of his gravely weakened body — and then when Evelyn found out about Alcoholics Anonymous, and that South Bend had a group, Brownie was finally willing to go, and to take it fully seriously.

Evelyn must have sensed somehow that the fundamental divide had finally been crossed, because she started living with him again. Somehow she knew that things were finally going in a different direction, and that — how, she did not know — there was HOPE out there somewhere.



My wife put me in this place, and this doctor came out, and he had done the same identical things to me that the doctor in Chicago did, and he told me the same identical thing: alcohol was my problem.

My wife come over from Chicago, and she finally got her a job at the Blue Star store, and moved me out of there. We went to have a room together, we . . . begin to stay together.

She found Alcoholics Anonymous for me, I didn't find Alcoholics Anonymous. My wife found Alcoholics Anonymous for me, because my nerves was shot to hell, I couldn't do nothing. She said, "Why don't you join this thing A.A.? — Alcoholics Anonymous or something, I don't know." I said, "I believe I will, call 'em up."

My wife called 'em up, and for the first time in my whole entire life, with tears in my eyes, I thought that it was help for me. I had prayed a long, long time. Now I *wanted* to quit. I didn't come on no A.A. program because of jail, or lost my job, or something like that, because I didn't have them. I wanted to *quit*. I wanted to get back with normal people.

Brownie broke out crying, but with a different kind of tears this time — not tears of blind despair, but tears of HOPE RENEWED. How did Evelyn know, even before she found out that there was such a thing as Alcoholics Anonymous, that hope had somehow returned? How did Brownie know, without having seen any A.A. people yet, without knowing anything about the content of the program at all, or the way it was run, that hope had somehow returned?

The human mind has powers that we do not even begin to understand. Somehow, at times, we can in some way feel the mighty power of God silently and anonymously at work, and

starting to course through our lives to work mighty and miraculous deeds, without any conscious awareness yet at all of what is going to take place, or even any normal, rational way of knowing that something major is about to happen. But somehow we just feel it. REAL HOPE HAD ARRIVED, and Evelyn and Brownie both felt it, and knew that it had *at all costs* to be seized.

It was the year 1950, the year Brownie turned thirty-six. The South Bend A.A. group sent two people to make the traditional twelfth-step call on Brownie, and he accepted what they said without hesitation:

These mens walked in there that night, two men, knocked on my door. And these men sat down, and begin to tell me about this wonderful program. And all the time these mens was talking to me, tears was in my eyes, because I had got so weak that I couldn't even help myself. I wanted help.

I had twenty-five dollars in my pocket, and I gave it to my sponsors, and that's all I had, and I said, "I don't know how much this thing cost, but I'm gonna pay on it, and I'll pay as we go along." My sponsor says, "No, it don't work that way." He returned the money back to me, and he said, "I'm only giving you what was so freely given to me, and maybe someday, that you can give this to somebody else, or maybe you can help somebody else."

Now I don't know what they said the first night that I attend my A.A. meeting. It was because, when I came into A.A., I had to sit on my hands. I see peoples come in today, they don't have to sit on their hands. I was shaking. I had to sip coffee out of a cup like a dog.

I began to get into the A.A. program and work it to the best of my ability. I don't need no one to tell me about Alcoholics Anonymous, because I studied it, I know it.

When they say, “Brother, have we seen a person fail that thoroughly followed our path?” that’s the truth. *You don’t get drunk* when you thoroughly follow the path of A.A.

You get drunk because you quit practicing the principles of A.A. Not “you made a slip” — ain’t no *slip* — you just quit practicing the principles. You *choose* to go back out there, better than you *choose* to stay in A.A. I don’t like to hear the “slip.” ’Cause I been there myself, I been as low as you can go.

That sure and certain vision of hope is there, Brownie proclaims, for any and all who work the program to the best of their ability. As long as they do that, *they will not get drunk*.

It does not matter how low the person has fallen. It does not matter if you are sleeping in an alley on skid row. Raymond Irving, who had both Brownie and Bill Hoover as his sponsors and eventually became an inspiration to countless younger people coming into the program, spent months genuinely sleeping in alleys on skid row in Chicago.

For all practical purposes, Brownie said, he himself was on skid row when he came into the A.A. program. *The real skid row is not a place, it is a state of mind*. It is a state of total despair and complete, mind-numbing *hopelessness* — giving up on eating, and bathing, and attempting to do anything but lie there and drink. And many an alcoholic coming into A.A. has been in that state of mind when he or she first came through the doors. In Dante’s *Inferno*, the sign over the gate into hell is said to bear a very simple message:

Abandon all hope,  
you who enter here.

That is the fundamental character of the dark and infernal city: total despair, and complete hopelessness.

I think it is many coming here . . . have been on skid row. Now here this don't means that you got to be on the street. You can be in your home and be on skid row. I seen a many gals and boys have got far up in the house, no one to help.

If you have sunk into the despair and hopelessness of skid row down in your mind, you will die just as tragically and hopelessly in a fine home as you will in an actual alley, lying on the cold, hard bricks.

Since I have been on the A.A. program, I made a call on one gal one time, and she was a nun. What she wanted me [to do was] to come over there and bring her A.A., because her pride wouldn't let her come to an A.A. meeting. She couldn't afford to be seen where these drunks at, and want me to bring it.

I said, "Well, it don't work that way. I don't be bringing no A.A. You got to get out and face it, and stand on your own two feet, like the rest of the peoples doing."

[But] I proceeded to go that night, and she was smoking a cigarette and it went between the chairs. The next morning they found her between the bedroom and her living room, on the floor dead.

Her mother choose to have all A.A.'s to be her pallbearers: me, Tony [Wilkie], ah . . . Nicky [Brownie's good friend Nick Kowalski], 'nother Mexican feller they call Joe Fernandez, and some more A.A. was her pallbearers. And I looked down upon that woman, and I said to myself, "By the grace of God, this could be me."

Brownie makes the insightful observation here that the winos lying in the alleys of Chicago or New York City or St. Louis are lying there, not just because they have fallen into despair and hopelessness, but also because they are too proud. Now this may seem like a strange thing to say, but Brownie juxtaposes the story of the proud young woman to his statement about the real nature of skid row because it is in fact true. *The winos sprawled in the alley are lying there because they are too proud.*

They are too proud to admit a mistake. They are too proud to ask for help. They are too proud to learn anything new, that goes against what they are already convinced is so. They are too proud to bow down as beginning students at the feet of the only teachers who know how to help them. They are too proud to associate with recovering alcoholics.

Augustine, the great African saint, said fifteen hundred years ago that God is Truth Itself (*verum ipsum*), the one who is the otherwise unseen actor behind those moments of sudden insight which reshape our lives.<sup>57</sup> We meet him in action every time he grants us, as a gift of grace, some deeper understanding of the universal truths and true meanings that structure the cosmos. Our eyes open in amazement as we say, “But it’s so obvious! Why didn’t I see that before?” We encounter him every time he reveals to us, by his grace, the truth about ourselves and our own lives. But this is the important point: Augustine went on to say that the greatest thing which blocks us from accepting God and all his gifts of real truth, is that we are too proud to admit that we spent all those years being wrong. Whether we are sleeping in an alley or living in a fine mansion, we are too proud to get well, and our ultimate fates will not be that much different.

What is the difference between that poor young woman burning herself to death in a fancy house, and a wino huddling in the winter in a cardboard box, covered with newspapers and greasy rags to try to keep himself warm, who passes out while smoking a cigarette and burns himself alive?

But she was afraid there might be winos, and ex-convicts, and street people, and other people like that at a regular A.A. meeting, and she was too proud to associate with people like them. And so she died no differently, essentially, from the poor wino whom she despised.

Brownie tries to lay it on the line to people like that — the proud ones, who are afraid they might have to associate with people at an A.A. meeting whom they do not like to be around. If you are an alcoholic, and you actually want the program, you will do whatever is necessary to be done, no matter how hard or distasteful, or how much your precious pride suffers.

When Brownie, once the big-time nightclub m.c., first started going to the A.A. meetings in South Bend there in 1950, they shoved him back in the kitchen with Bill Hoover and Jimmy Miller, sorted through the shelves till they found an old broken cup for his coffee, and humiliated him in countless petty and degrading ways at all points. What kind of program did these people think that they were working, to treat another of God's children that way? What would I, as a human parent, think about someone who treated one of *my* children that way? — someone who then nonchalantly turned right around and asked *me* for help? And yet, all those who come into A.A. and make it, must learn to leave their pride behind. Brownie realized that those people's behavior was despicable, but that regardless of how they behaved, his primary concern had to be saving his own life, not defending his pride. Just

be grateful, Brownie is warning newcomers, that the sacrifice to your pride is not very likely to be anything like what I had to endure in those earliest years in A.A.

Brownie was very clear, that in a truly spiritual program, no one should ever have to endure the humiliation to which he and Bill Hoover and Jimmy Miller were subjected. But even in the best possible circumstances, active alcoholics are inwardly total egomaniacs, and from the minute they walk through the doors of A.A., it will be necessary for them to suffer blow after painful blow to their prideful self-delusions, until the necessary ego-deflation has occurred, and real healing and the growth of true self-esteem can begin to appear.

And on the other side of that experience of ego-deflation, we will learn something far better than foolish pride: we will learn real self-love, real love of life, real self-esteem, and real freedom from shame. In some ways a true sense of self-worth feels a lot *like* pride, but it has a strength and resiliency that worldly pride can never have. Brownie certainly did not turn into a wimp or a doormat! What he learned to do instead, was to exchange his old empty boasting and vain, pompous self-importance for a new kind of iron strength and lion-like courage — but fighting now for the truly important things — and he learned how to do this, not in drunken fantasy but in hard reality.

You see, I didn't have it easy when I come on the A.A. program. I'm not afraid to talk about this A.A. program; I'm not ashamed to talk about it. Because I didn't have it easy.

Because when I come on the A.A. program, my people wasn't welcome. They was meeting in the homes at that time. I had to drink coffee out of a broken cup because they

refused to give me a decent cup. Yes, I've sat in some of 'em's homes, where they put their finger in their nose at me, and then they buck at me. In other words, want me to get out of there.

But I wasn't particular about being with them. What I wanted is what you had. I was trying to get sober. All I wanted to do was to learn it. They couldn't run me away. The rest of 'em were behind me pushing, saying "Brown, push on!" and they kept pushing me, and I kept going. It say, oh look-it! — it wasn't easy for me to make the A.A. program.

But [when] I [first] come here, a thought come to me: if they open the door, I get it myself. And I begin to study this A.A. program. And when I mean study it, I *know* it. I don't need you to tell me about it. I knows everything, in the steps, and everything, what it says.

Raymond Irving, who had Brownie and Bill Hoover as his sponsors, warns newcomers solemnly: "*You must want it with a burning desire.*"

Everyone who ends up achieving long term sobriety in the Alcoholics Anonymous program remembers being angrier at many times during their first year in A.A. than they could ever remember having been in their lives: angry at what one of the old-timers said to them, angry at everyone in the meeting, angry at the whole ground-shift taking place in their lives, angry that they cannot drink anymore to numb the anger.

That is the point where the newcomer must remember what Raymond said, and what Brownie said — they are essentially the same message in slightly different words — and turn their anger into a positive direction.



You must want it with a burning desire.

If they open the door, I get it myself.

For this is the Pearl of Great Price, for which the wealthy merchant sold all that he possessed, in order that he might buy it. No one who ever gained that True Pearl has ever regretted a single expenditure or a single sacrifice they had to make in order to obtain it. On the contrary, their prayers ever after are songs of gratitude past the power of the human tongue to express. It is indeed the Pearl which surpasses all the other gems of the earth.



## CHAPTER 14

### **Brownie: Gratitude and the Man Who Had No Arms or Legs**

Cedric had already come in shortly before Brownie, so these two added to Bill Hoover and Jimmy Miller produced a solid core of four committed black A.A. members in the South Bend group. Shortly after that, R. J. Newhouse, then Lester Smith, and then Ezell Agnew also came in.

Somewhere around 1955 or 56, very roughly, Mitchell C. came in. Brownie became his sponsor and the two men became good friends. Raymond Irving says that Mitch and Brownie “used to run together. He would cut Brownie’s hair, and Brownie would shine his shoes — that was their trade — one would cut hair and the other would shine shoes.” Mitch worked at Healthwin Hospital. He became active in one of the black churches, and finally stopped going to A.A. meetings, but he stayed sober.

Brownie ended up getting a job at White Farm Equipment Company, where he stayed until he retired, working on the assembly line on one of the machines. R. J. Newhouse and Jimmy Miller’s oldest brother worked at White Farm for years also. Brownie and his wife Evelyn lived at 734 Hill Street after he got his feet back under him and got a regular job.

Brownie became a powerful A.A. speaker, and a very successful sponsor. He insisted on willingness and commitment on the part of a pigeon before he would take him on.

I used to make a twelve-step call on you, and I would tell you quick, “There’s no use you taking up my time, or me taking up yours. If you want what I got, I’m willing to give it to you, which was so freely given to me. Now if you want it, I’ll give it to you; if you don’t, forget it.”

Part of the alcoholic denial system is to insist that “I would be able to stop drinking if I could just get my wife back,” or “if I could just get a job with prestige (and monetary rewards, of course) commensurate with my training and talents,” or “if my mother and father would just *understand* me,” or (in the case of a supposedly erudite and well-educated college president at one of the good universities in this part of Indiana) “if I could just get enough *sex*”!!! The A.A. people who heard that last remark laughed with great glee. Too many A.A. people have conducted personal experiments in that area, back when they were still drinking, and their universal experience is that, although getting sober that way sounds attractive in theory, in actual practice, it doesn’t seem to matter how much sex an alcoholic gets — a different person every night, or whatever one might want — it has never yet enabled that alcoholic to stop drinking.

Nick Kowalski (who had gotten sober in the famous A.A. prison group at the Michigan City state penitentiary) said, in a lead he gave in Ann Arbor, that Brownie had a standard response to alcoholics who used that kind of excuse:<sup>58</sup>

We have a wonderful fellow named Brownie maybe I should get up here, from South Bend . . . . A wonderful kind of story he always tells, of the guys coming around here

talking about their wife, or mother, or their kids, and the reason they can't sober up [is because of what these other people are doing].

He said, "You know, I go to an awful lot of wakes, and I look in that casket, and I never seen only one person in there. So you better learn to take yourself from here to there, 'cause you're going alone! [*Laughter*] Why worry about all these people who ain't gonna get to go with you anyhow?" [*Laughter*]

I think there's a kind of honesty in there, that I really need from time to time, you know.

Put in technical philosophical language, Brownie was an existentialist! Life is lived towards death. If I try to flee from this realization by denying my powerlessness and attempting to achieve some kind of illusion of absolute control, my life will disintegrate and fragment into meaninglessness and absurdity. If I wish instead to live authentically, the only way I can seize my own authentic existence is by the resolute projection of my life upon death as my ownmost possibility. He was an existentialist, but with a different kind of flavor than we find in most of the continental European existentialists of the early twentieth century. The fact that we live our lives towards death played an important role in Brownie's preaching, but there was a positive quality, a bold joyfulness, to his understanding of this — and a kindness and compassion towards others — which one cannot find in a stern faced, Teutonic existentialist like Heidegger, for example.

Sharon K. says that there was one man who would come to A.A. meetings roaring drunk, and stand up and start denouncing the other people in the group and all their wrongheaded ideas. Finally, the minute the man started to open his mouth, Brownie would turn and instantly snap at him, "Shut up! You don't know

*nothing yet.*” And then go on as if nothing had happened. For a solid year, Brownie refused to let the man say one single word at a meeting. This persistent shock treatment worked. The man finally achieved long term sobriety and became a dedicated member of the program, and could laugh heartily when telling newcomers about what Brownie had done to him — because Brownie truly loved him, and knew that this was what *had* to be done to him, given *where he had gotten lost inside his own head* at that point.

In 1970, the year Brownie celebrated twenty years of sobriety, he started an A.A. meeting called the Friendship Group — still usually referred to simply as “Brownie’s” even now, all these years after his death — which still meets at 616 Pierce Street in South Bend on Thursday and Saturday evenings (just off Portage Avenue, near downtown). This meeting was a spin-off, Raymond Irving said, of the Monday night meetings which Brownie attended regularly for many years at the old Area Hall in South Bend.

One of the more colorful aspects of Brownie’s A.A. participation was the security guard’s uniform he would wear on occasion. Raymond explained the reason for this:

Down there at the group he had, sometimes they would leave late — Ruby, Marge, they was elder ladies — and sometimes the group would go on, like 10:30, 11 o’clock, and people would be kind of scared going out.

So Brownie got him a uniform — I call it “doorshaker” [Chicago slang for a night guard who goes along shaking doors to make sure they are securely locked] — but [I guess you would call it a] security uniform. By getting this uniform, he had handcuffs, he had the billy club, and he had the gun. And he would wear this uniform on Saturday nights, Thursday nights, he’d put this uniform on. And he would see that people got to their cars safe.

There are tales (which may be purely apocryphal) of Brownie having to get out his billy club and handcuffs when confronting a particularly violent drunk on a twelfth-step call. But there could be an element of truth to this — Submarine Bill remembers one twelfth-step call which he himself made, where the drunk swung at him, and he in turn, by pure reflex action (he had been a semi-professional boxer at one point in his life) swung back, and laid the drunk out on the floor, bleeding profusely from his nose. “Why did you do that?” the drunk mumbled in mystified confusion. “I don’t know,” Bill replied, “it just seemed like the right thing to do,” and then went to get some paper napkins to help the man stop the bleeding.

Twelfth-step calls are not usually hazardous, but on rare occasions, an out-of-control drunk is capable of literally anything. A.A. preaches the avoidance of violence and brawling whenever possible, but it has never been a pacifist movement — a good many of its members have served in the armed services in time of war, or in police or security jobs at some point in their lives. So there may have been some occasion when Brownie had to either use force, or indicate a willingness to do so if necessary.

The lead which Brownie gave, where someone fortunately had a tape recorder going, was given around 1972. It was two years after he started the Friendship Group, when he was about fifty-eight years old, and had been sober for around twenty-two years. That is a long time in the program, and yet Brownie’s voice was still filled with passion and energy and vigor. And he understood good and well that the only way an alcoholic ever *stays* sober is to continue to stay new, to put away pride, to stay humble, and to stay teachable.

When I came on the A.A. program, I promised my God that I would do the best of my ability in carrying the message. And that's what I'm doing. And I do not let A.A. get old to me. It's just as new to me as it was twenty-some years ago, and I'm still carrying the message. I don't want to graduate on the A.A. program. I want to stay dumb. Because, so many of 'em I see graduate, they soon get drunk anyhow.

One of the people who loved Brownie especially dearly was Red Knaak, who ended up moving to Lansing in the 1970's and starting a famous A.A. group there called the Dignitaries Sympathy Group.<sup>59</sup> Red in turn sponsored a younger man named Chris up in Lansing, and for many years after Brownie's death, Chris would bring that Lansing group down to South Bend for one month every summer, either in July or August, and they would take over the Friendship Group meeting for that month. They brought speakers from the university at Lansing, and continued to honor Brownie's memory, and Nick Kowalski's memory also. Then other Dignitaries Sympathy Groups were formed, by Red Knaak or by young men whom he had sponsored, in Chicago and its suburbs, and in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and in Bloomington in southern Indiana. Some of these groups would also travel to South Bend for a month every year, to speak at the Saturday night meeting at Brownie's, to honor both Brownie and Nick Kowalski. Or they would invite Raymond Irving or other members of the group which met at Brownie's to come visit their town and speak to them. There are even groups in the New York City area and in Florida and California and other distant places who regard themselves as the children of Brownie, Nick Kowalski, and Red Knaak.

Brownie died at Memorial Hospital in South Bend on November 23, 1983, at the age of sixty-nine, with thirty-three



years sobriety. But as Raymond said, Brownie's spirit still lives on, directly in those who, like Raymond himself and Red, had Brownie as their sponsor, and at second and third hand, in people like Chris in Lansing, and those whose lives Raymond has touched. The spirit of a single good man can, in this fashion, roll down through the generations, touching even more lives in each subsequent generation in a sort of multiplication process. Sometimes by the third or fourth remove, the person who is helped does not even know that original good man or good woman's name anymore, but that is why this group is called *Alcoholics Anonymous*. God knows, and the holy angels know, and perhaps — what can human beings here on this earth understand of such things? — an additional star suddenly appears on those good people's heavenly crowns each time their spirits still at work on earth bring peace and love and new life and salvation to some poor soul going down the path of destruction.

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Brownie worked hard, all his life in A.A., to eliminate racism in the movement. He tried to get the message across that the fear and hostility that had black people and white people divided against one another had no business being in a God-centered program like A.A.

And they told me that this was a spiritually program. Well now, if this is a spiritually program, ain't got no business being prejudiced. My God tells me, "I have no respect for persons." Alcohol ain't prejudiced. It don't give a damn who it tear down.

And I think in the [Preface] of *Alcoholics Anonymous* [which we read at meetings, it says that A.A.] "is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other, that we may solve the

common problem and to help others achieve sobriety.” That’s what it says. Get into it, read it, if it’s a spiritually program, and act like that is a spiritually program, work like it’s a spiritually program.

Some of [those prejudiced people I had to deal with when I first came into the fellowship], today some of those peoples are my best friends.

I have talked all over the state of Indiana, in every institution in the state of Indiana — was sent to Gary to break down discrimination in Gary.

Editor’s note: Gary, a big steel mill city, was located along the Chicago axis, one of the first stops on the South Shore interurban railroad line that ran between Chicago and South Bend. The black A.A. leaders from the various towns along that axis visited one another and helped support one another continuously. See chapters 18 and 19 of this book for the story of John Shaifer, a black A.A. leader in Gary who came into the program in 1960, ten years after Brownie..

I remember once, Dr. Smith (he’s dead now) had left the old hospital, but they was having trouble in Gary. He asked me would I go over and make a talk there, at that time they was meeting in the YMCA there. I say, “Yes, be glad to.” So he set up an appointment with me, to come there to talk. He said, “I don’t know what’s wrong.” He say, “The black peoples keep coming back in this institution [saying] that they can’t get into A.A.” I said “Well, I be there.”

Now I didn’t know what I was gonna say, but I asked God to put the words in my mouth, when I get there. Now they likeded me, but they didn’t like the rest of ’em. When I went in there, they pat me on the back, and said “We have Brownie from South Bend as our speaker, and Brownie’s here to give you a word of wisdom.”

And when I walked in, I asked 'em, "How many love God in here, raise their hand." Everybody stuck their hand up in the air, "I love God." And I said, "How many don't love God in here, raise their hand." Four fellows in the back raised their hands, says, "Well, I don't love God." The whole entire audience turned around and looked at the people saying that they didn't love God.

And I stood there and talked for a little bit, and I looked at them and said, "*Why in the hell* would all of you turn around, and look at those four fellows raise their hands, say they didn't love God, and in your *Twenty-Four Hour* book I'm told to love 'em. It tells me, 'How can you love one that you haven't ever seen, and hate your brother?' Which tells me that you're lying, the truth is not in it. If this is a spiritually founded program, you first got to know what God means. You ain't never seen God before in your life! They tell me God made man in his own image — not in yours! In his's!"

Because we're only here for just a few days, and pass on. So let us try to enjoy ourself while we here — not with hate or not with prejudice. There's no use a going to hell or die, with prejudice — have some foe in your life — because we don't have but three score years and ten, and that's seventy years, and some of you don't have that. We here to try to live and help one another.

Brownie was reminding them of the reading for October 11 in *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, where Richmond Walker (the second most published early A.A. author) was quoting from the First Letter of John in the New Testament. Goshen Bill also liked to quote this same passage (see Chapter 16). This is the entire passage in its original biblical version (1 John 4:7-8 and 4:20):

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because GOD IS LOVE . . . . Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are *liars*; because those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

Why is racism bad? Because it is a form of hatred. It kills the divine life of the soul, like any other kind of hatred. The object of the A.A. program is to learn to live out our brief lives on this earth with serenity and peace and joy, which means that hatred of anybody or anything will destroy all our inner peace and enjoyment.

There was also something extraordinary here which needs to be noted. Given the way some of the white people treated him when he first came in, why didn't Brownie hate them all? And yet there are still a lot of white people in South Bend A.A. whom Brownie sponsored, and they will tell you that he loved them just as much as he loved the black people whom he sponsored. Bill Hoover, who was black, had two pigeons in 1975 whom he took to meetings all over the area: Raymond Irving was black and Brooklyn Bob Firth was white. Raymond and Bob have always made it clear to everybody that Bill Hoover saved their lives — Brooklyn Bob in particular, because the way he had been acting, everyone else in the program had given up on him. Brownie and Bill Hoover did not in fact return hatred for hatred. In these two volumes, we have described in some detail the dark and dismal way both of them were treated when they first came into A.A. So it is not a light or trivial question when we ask, why didn't they hate back? The answer is, because genuinely working the program

with total devotion gave them a nobility of soul which allowed them to shine as a light in the midst of that darkness, until the light overcame the darkness and all was filled with their light.

Hate is the opposite of life. We were not put here on earth to waste our lives in hatred. That kind of tormented existence is the opposite of living. And as Brownie said, above all, “we here to try to live.” *Our lives are all lived towards death, but during the brief time that we are allotted here on earth, we are here to try to live with joy and appreciation and love.*

Brownie’s good friend Nick Kowalski was talking about exactly the same thing when he spoke of how, when he first entered the Michigan City prison, “he couldn’t do the time.” But then in A.A., Nick discovered a new and different way of life, so that now he was “doing God’s time.” Living in that new way, Nick said, he could come to the end of the day and say, “the day has been satisfied.” It was the same as the central message of the great A.A. meditational book, *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*: when I allow the divine love to flow fully into me and through me, as my empowering life-energy, then my temporal life in this box of space and time we call the phenomenal, physical universe becomes one of the little subcurrents within the flow of the mighty river of the divine eternal Life, and I participate in its divinity and eternity.

The A.A. program is about learning to live. Racial prejudice and hatred are just another version of the old death wish, the old evil desire to hurt and destroy and put down other people. The spirituality of A.A. teaches us to put aside that old death wish, the old enjoyment of suffering. We alcoholics cross a great divide when we finally decide that *we want to live*. If we fall back into racial hatred and fear and the constant rehearsal of old resentments, we turn back into that old land of death and suffering and hatred,

the land (ultimately) of despair and hopelessness. Alcoholics have no other choice — to hate is to die.

Hatred is especially bad for us, Brownie added, because we are not only here in A.A. to try to live, but also “to help one another.” This spirit of true helpfulness comes from learning how to love again, and from learning how to put away our old total selfishness. The true power behind it is our own personal gratitude for being sober today, by the grace of God. Gratitude is the antidote to selfishness and hatred. Learning to practice constant gratitude is not only the path to real joy in life, Brownie said, but also the only way he found to conquer his own inability to love other people. He was still filled with hate, he said, even after he had been in the A.A. program for several years or more — a generalized hatred for everyone and everything around him. It was only when he learned to feel the true meaning of gratitude, he said, that he was able to let go of this hate that was poisoning his serenity.

I was in Lansing here last Saturday, making a talk [to a group of students there at the university], with races of peoples from all over the world. And some of the races, you don’t even know the name of ’em, ’cause I didn’t either. And they all was getting along, and laughing, and talking together, and I said to myself, “This what God like, because it’s ‘Love one another as I have loved you.’” You gotta love your fellow man.

Now I may talk about — ’cause I could go on all night, ’cause I can get hot in here on this thing if I wanted to! — but I ain’t get too hot in here tonight, I’m gonna cool it off in here in a little bit. Far as I go, I can get into it!

It’s *grateful for being sober*. We must learn to be *grateful*. This is *the only chance that we have*, is to help one another.

Now, we get into *grateful*, remind me of a fellow, a deacon who used to get in the church, and he would shout every Sunday, he would shout so much until the people couldn't even hear what the preacher was talking about. So they thought they better go out and talk to him, say "Deacon, about all this shouting and going on, . . . the other members can't hear [the preacher]."

So they went out on the farm where he was at, and he had two big mules out there plowing. The two deacons walked up to the other deacon, he says, "You know," he said, "you gonna have to stop that shouting in church every Sunday, so they can hear what the preacher talking about!"

He said, "Well, I want to tell you something." He said, "You see all this land here?" Other deacons say, "Yes." He say, "God give that to me." He say, "You see all this corn on this land here?" "Yeah." Said, "God gave that to me." He said, "Yes, and look, and see that pretty red barn over there?" "Yeah." Say, "God gave that to me." And said, "And look over here, see that big beautiful white house? My wife and kids is in there." Say, "God gave that to me." He said, "You know what? And if you hold these mules, I'll shout some more!!!"

*Grateful.* And that's what we have to be, grateful on the A.A. program.

Not being like the drunk that staggered into church one Sunday morning, and went right down to the pew of the church, and the preacher was preaching a good sermon that morning, and he said — the preacher got through preaching, he said — "You know what Reverend?" He said, "You preached a *damn* good sermon!" The preacher said, "Now let me tell you, sir, I'm not going to have this cursing in this church." He said, "I can't help it," says, "you preached a good sermon." He said, "You know, you preached so *damn* good, until I put *fifty dollars* in the collection box." The preacher said, "The *hell* you did!" [*Laughter*]

Brownie said that, for himself, it was one particular experience, that he still remembered vividly, that made him feel, for the first time, the incredible power of gratitude to remake the soul. For quite some time, he had been committed to A.A., and he had been working the A.A. program as hard as he knew how, but the hatred that still filled his heart made him hostile towards every single human being he had to deal with. It had become almost unbearable to him. He was miserable.

Five years after he took his last drink, Brownie got to go to the Second International A.A. Convention, which was held in his old home town, St. Louis, in July 1955. He took pride ever after that he had gotten to hear Bill W. himself in person at that conference. This was the momentous assembly that ratified the Third Legacy program for A.A. self-governance, devised by Bill W. to continue the work of leading A.A. after both he and Dr. Bob were gone.

Editorial note: there was a lot of symbolism here. St. Louis was the place where the first black people came into the A.A. program, and Brownie must surely have seen some of them helping out at the convention. And one of the speakers at the convention was Dr. James C. Scott, Jr., the African-American physician who founded the black A.A. group in Washington D.C., the nation's capital. But it was not this sense of some of the early triumphs over racism and prejudice which healed Brownie's inner rage and anger at the world. It took something totally individual and human.

Brownie had not had a drink in five years, but he was only "dry," to use the A.A. phrase: he had not gained true serenity. Being "on a dry drunk" is not just a loose metaphor in A.A., but a precise technical term for a very specific phenomenon: it means



that the individuals are physically free of alcohol, but are still psychologically, and especially spiritually, continuing to operate on the basis of their old alcoholic ways of thinking and feeling. They are basically just as filled with fear and rage and misery as the worst drunk that ever was, they are just not drinking while they are feeling that way. They do not do nearly as much harm that way, but that is about all that can be said positively about that kind of continuous inner anguish.

It was during this St. Louis Convention that Brownie saw something that taught him, at the true gut level, what gratitude was really about, and the spiritual scales suddenly fell from his eyes, and he could see the things of the spirit and be freed of his rage.

See, I was a very unhappy person when I first come on the program. I still didn't like human beings. I wasn't particular about you, I still had hate in me, yes-sir-bob. Didn't like you. I bought a suit from Gilbert's [the best men's clothing store in South Bend] — I bought two suits from Gilbert's — to attend this convention in 1955. I still have pictures of that.

Setting in this auditorium of five thousand people, from all over the world — some was deaf-dumb, some was blind, and even some with no legs — and here I'm setting up here looking at all these five thousand peoples from all over the world. I cast my eyes down upon a man that didn't have no legs, and no arms, and this man were laughing. And I said to myself, "What the hell is he laughing about? Wherever this man goes, somebody got to push him there. Whatever this man do, somebody got to help to do whatever he have to do."

I sat there and begin to feel my arms, begin to feel my legs, begin to feel my eyes, and said to myself, "Who in the

hell say this A.A. program won't work!" Then that's when I began to practice the principles and work the program.

Suddenly Brownie realized that, if this man can feel gratitude and overflowing joy, what in the world justification can I give for ME going around twenty-four hours a day allowing myself to feel nothing but resentment and self-pity and hatred for everything and everyone around me??!!

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The A.A. program will not work its full miracle, Brownie said, until you actively commit yourself to it. It is not an intellectual puzzle to be solved, a theological debate to try to win, a set of mechanical, legalistic rules to follow, or a set of words and phrases to be recited with a solemn and pious look on your face. The way you learn to live life, is simply to throw yourself in and start actually living life. The way you learn to live the spiritual life of the A.A. program is simply to jump in and start actually living it.

*Get in the program and not on it.* There's a difference between "on" and "in." A individual that's *on*, all he knows to do is fool around here and get drunk. But when you begin to get *into* the A.A. program, and begin to work this program to the best of your ability, you are going to get some help. This program is like a bank. If you put nothing in it, you get nothing out of it. You got to put something in it.

I am just like the old Irishman said, in Goshen, Indiana, years ago, when Wilkie had a big group there. He said, "A.A. is my medicine, and God is my doctor."

Actually living the spiritual life of A.A. means *service*. Living *life* means living *love*, and love is not some warm, fuzzy feeling that we have when we are congratulating ourselves on having such a wonderfully warm and fuzzy feeling. *Love* means *service*.

Living selfishly, on the other hand, always ultimately means being sucked back into the old death wish.

In the A.A. program, the most important symbol of the life of loving service is also the one service to God which a recovering alcoholic is uniquely qualified to carry out in a way that no other human being on earth can do it: extending love and help to another suffering alcoholic.

The way I feel today about A.A., I am *in* the A.A. program, I always got time to go and call on another person if he's suffering from alcoholism. I don't want to ever forget where I come from, and if he's suffered like I suffered, he *needs* help.

I want to get down to the last part of the twelve steps, "sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God," and carrying the message. Hear a lot of us say we'll carry the message — we'll carry it to some nice neighborhood, or we'll carry it to some wealthy neighborhood, but we won't carry it out on the dump, where another sick alcoholic [is lying there]. It didn't say that. It say carry the message regardless of wherever this alcoholic may be. If he's on skid row or the dump, it's carry the message for him.

A few more words I'm going to say, and I'm gonna shut up. You know I had the opportunity to speak in [the town of] Osceola. They wanted me to come there in this beautiful huge church and make a talk to the members, and what they wanted to know — what did A.A. have, that the church people didn't have? I says, "Ah . . . when you get me up there, I'll tell you what we have, that the church people doesn't have."

A deacon came over to me, and he said, "What verse and what chapter are you gonna talk on?" — licking his fingers, [and flipping the pages of his Bible] and going on. "I doing my talk on alcoholism." He got up and rumbled his coat

and bobbed and went over there and set in the pew, and begin to look at me.

And when the preacher got up there and he called me, I told them, “I was glad to have the opportunity to come before you, and what your pastor wanted you all [to hear the answer to was], ‘What did A.A. have, that the church people didn’t have?’ *The church peoples looks at the outer appearance, and we looks at the inner appearance.*”

I said, “Although you’re a beautiful church here, with a rug — red rug — running from the door clear down to the pulpit, if a man would come to your church ragged and dirty, no place to go, and set down in one of your pews — the first thing you want to do is to call the police and have him throwed in jail. And I could be in your pulpit, with a hicky thing to sit on, and the first thing I would do is throw my arms around him, and say, ‘Brother, what can I do for you?’

“Because God don’t want the outer appearance, outer appearance doesn’t mean nothing. It’s the inner appearance. That’s what we have. When an individual come on the program, we *know* he ain’t got nothing, we *know* that he’s seeking help. And that [is why], from the bottom of my heart [I sincerely mean the words of my prayer] when we make the call on him, and say a prayer: ‘God help him.’

“Or maybe — night’s job — got up at four o’clock in the morning and made a twelfth-step call, Nick Kowalski and I, on a sick alcoholic. Just tell me anybody else would a got up! Would the preacher got up? Naw, he wouldn’t a came. Would the doctor came? Naw, he say, ‘Take a pill and I’ll see you in the morning.’ But we went, because we know.”

When a sick alcoholic comes into his first A.A. meeting, that person does not realize it, but the people with some recovery under their belts look at him with eyes that see deep below the surface. Someone who knows their antiques can go into a junk shop, and

see an old chair or table — dirty, stained, covered with layer after layer of peeling, ugly paint, and maybe with gouges and nicks in it — and it looks to everyone else like just a piece of junk. But this person, who knows his antiques, can see that this is an unusually fine and beautiful piece of furniture, a real work of art. All it takes is some scrubbing, and some paint remover, and some sanding, and a little bit of careful repair work here and there, and all the beauty of that fine chair or table will shine forth once more.

When drunks first come into A.A., down deep, they believe that they themselves are nothing but junk. The people already in the program (those who have moved far enough into recovery) see something quite different in each of these newcomers — a unique work of God’s art, and “God don’t make junk,” not *ever*. What they see is a lovable little Child of God, innocent and good-hearted.

Earth people look at the outer appearance, and A.A. people look at the inner appearance. But it is only in the inner appearance that we find the true Child of God. What would any decent human beings do if they saw a little child out wandering on the street, lost and homeless, filthy and dirty and dressed in shabby clothes, emaciated from lack of food, shaking from sickness, crying uncontrollably, or afraid to say a single word out of blind fear? Could any decent human beings stand there blind and oblivious to that?

Your heart bleeds for the poor souls who stumble into the A.A. meetings. A lot of them are trying their best to put on a “tough street kid” act — maybe some of them are even fooling themselves into believing it. And for these “tough guys,” your heart simply bleeds all the more, because down deep they are the ones with the deepest fears, the ones who are the most frightened of them all.

You cannot take people who are old enough to walk into an A.A. meeting, and force them to accept help. They are old enough to have the right to make their own life decisions. This means you have to give them total freedom to reject you and go back out again, if that is what they want to do. But you cannot shut your eyes to that Child of God whom you see underneath all the resentment and fear and overwhelming feelings of shame and guilt and pompous pretense and sheer malarkey, because you cannot shut your eyes to the Image of God without shutting your eyes to God himself. You cannot shut your eyes to the Image of God reflected in the mirrors of others' souls without shutting your eyes to the reflection of the divine glory in the mirror of your own soul.

Freely we were given help, and freely we must offer it, or we forfeit our own serenity and our own sobriety. The Way of Death is sometimes beautiful on the outside, like a corpse lying in a coffin, in the beautifully appointed viewing room of an expensive funeral home, with makeup on its face, dressed in a fine suit or dress, and resting on a satin cushion. And at other times we see men and women dressed in shabby clothes, faces haggard, hands shaking so hard that they have to put the coffee cup on the table and lap it up like a dog — but sitting there in that A.A. meeting because they have decided now that *they want to live*. No matter what these ragged men and women look like on the outside, this is the Way of Life. You must make your choice, but make it in full awareness of the consequences.

**Harold Brown**

1914–1983

## CHAPTER 15

### **Goshen Bill: Sleeping in a Dump Truck**

After the first black A.A. group was established in Chicago in March 1945, black A.A. began spreading east along the Chicago axis (as I have termed it), along the path of the South Shore interurban railroad, which took black A.A. into the foundries and factories of industrial cities like Gary and South Bend. And then this Chicago-style black A.A. movement began spreading even further eastwards, along the St. Joseph and Elkhart river valleys into cities like Mishawaka, Elkhart, and Goshen. And with Goshen, we had arrived at a world which still had some factories (mostly building recreational vehicles and house trailers), but where one could also see Amish farmers in their distinctive dress driving down the streets and highways in their horse and buggies.

William Henry Caldwell — known simply as “Goshen Bill” to everyone in the program — was a well-known figure in Elkhart and Goshen A.A. for many years. In fact, he was also involved in A.A. activities in a number of other parts of northern Indiana as well, including Kosciusko county, and the large city of Fort Wayne over on the eastern border.



### **William Henry Caldwell ("Goshen Bill")**

Came into the program around 1964, towards the end of what we might call first generation Alcoholics Anonymous.\* Like his famous predecessor Brownie (who came into the program in 1950), he ended up being as influential a figure among the white A.A.'s at the eastern end of the Chicago axis as he was among black A.A.'s. People of all backgrounds and races came to him for spiritual guidance and good old-fashioned A.A. wisdom.

\*The end of the first generation took place c. 1965–1971, with the deaths of Richmond Walker in 1965, Sister Ignatia in 1966, Father Ralph Pfau in 1967, and Bill Wilson and Ed Webster in 1971.



The following material comes from a lead he gave at the Twelve Golden Steps Group at Life House alcoholism treatment center in Elkhart, Indiana in 1981.<sup>60</sup> He had been sober for seventeen years at that time, and living in Goshen, Indiana all the while.

He had lived elsewhere during his earlier life — Los Angeles, California, and Dayton, Ohio, for example — and his drinking adventures had led him to a host of other towns like Compton (California), El Capitan, (New Mexico), Toledo (Ohio), and New Castle and Fort Wayne (Indiana). He knew the relatively homogeneous world of the upper midwest, but he also knew the west coast and the southwest, where various languages and cultures rubbed elbows with one another.

Goshen Bill had come into the program around 1964, sixteen years after Bill Hoover and Jimmy Miller first broke the color barrier in the A.A. groups of the St. Joseph river valley region, so although he too was black, he had never had to experience at first hand the full gamut of rejections and petty humiliations which Bill Hoover and Jimmy had initially experienced back in 1948, and which Brownie had also encountered to a significant degree when he came into the program in 1950. So perhaps partially for that reason, when attempts were made by some of the black A.A. leaders in South Bend to start the old “Interracial Group” up again — a group which would not be totally black, but heavily dominated by black members — Goshen Bill opposed the idea very vocally and vehemently.

But it was also true that, even back in his drinking days, Bill had never had any fear or apprehension about being around people of other races or cultures or languages. He had gotten drunk with

white men and black, with Mexicans and with Native Americans of various tribes, and he had discovered at first hand, that just as whiskey was the same all across the United States, so likewise the alcoholics who got drunk on it were all the same underneath. If an alcoholic had a bottle of whiskey, then even if you and he did not speak or understand one another's languages, it did not take much in the way of visual sign language, Bill had discovered, to have those two people getting merrily drunk together.

And since the underlying causes of alcoholism are the same among all human beings (resentment, fear, guilt, shame, egocentrism, and so on) the A.A. program is the same for all human beings. So Goshen Bill regarded the attempt to rekindle the old Interracial Group as the creation of what would in fact, he feared, end up being a black A.A. meeting for blacks only, and therefore a betrayal (by 1964 certainly) of everything A.A. stood for, and in fact of what Bill Hoover and Jimmy Miller had originally been fighting for. He continued to speak against it, even when a few of the blacks who supported the revived Interracial Group started surreptitiously referring to him contemptuously among themselves as nothing but a "white nigger."

It should be said that this was not just an A.A. issue, but a debate which was going on among black people all over the United States at that time. By the end of the 1960's, some black leaders were beginning to be disenchanted with what racial integration had produced, or at least had come to the conclusion that there ought to be places of some sort where black people could get together by themselves on occasion. Goshen Bill's position was clear, however: setting up an A.A. meeting for blacks only was just as bad as having an A.A. meeting which said it was for whites only.

## Goshen Bill's early life

Even among alcoholics, who tend to be loners and rebels and people who pride themselves on being survivors, Goshen Bill stood out as a man who went it alone, the hard way, from the very beginning:

I didn't go to college, I didn't go to high school. I went until I was promoted from first to second grade. Now from second to third . . . Ahnnh! I left! They wouldn't listen to me and I wouldn't listen to them.

So I went and got me a job, three dollars a week at the age of eight. And I been on my own ever since. I've had some good times and I've had some bad times.

Bill then said softly that, until he got into the A.A. program, "I had more bad times than I had good times."

Goshen Bill's father was a preacher, who did not have a full-time church of his own (he had to earn his living at other jobs), but did preach on numerous occasions. When the basket was being passed around at the meeting where Bill was giving this lead, he can be overheard on the tape recording making a little joking comment about it:

You know, my dad was a preacher, and he wouldn't preach until after they took up a collection. He wanted to know how much sermon they wanted! Well if they were short, he didn't preach long! *[Laughter]*

But in spite of the major influence of the church in his early background, Bill regarded the contemporary American churches (both Protestant and Catholic) as hopeless, helpless, and impotent when it came to aiding alcoholics. In fact, he thought it was even

worse than that. In a good A.A. group, when members continue to avoid doing a real fourth step and consistently grossly violate the spiritual principles of the program in their actual behavior, other people will call them on it, even if they do it in an extremely kind and gentle way. But the churches will look the other way and refuse to challenge members even when it is obvious that they are doing nothing but hypocritical play-acting. Too many churches, Goshen Bill had found, praised people simply for empty words, pious phrases without action, following mechanical rules and rituals, and putting money in the collection plate.

This was not the antagonism of a freethinker or atheist or agnostic (Bill himself had a simple and quite traditional Protestant Christian belief as part of his own deepest spiritual understanding).<sup>61</sup> It was more the old-fashioned Calvinist conviction that the greatest threat to the real spiritual life lies not with the openly acknowledged scoffers and anti-religious folk outside the church — it is the hypocrites sitting in the church pews every Sunday morning who are the truly serious threat to real religion, and the agents through whom Satan is able to accomplish some of his most destructive work!

The devil, he don't bother people in the tavern, he already got them. He working with the churches. See? They haven't got a program to live without drinking. All they got to do is to put money in that basket, and [everybody calls them] "Brother so-and-so-and-so . . ." I worked for an alcoholic, and I went to church with him, and they got two stars behind his name! Oh, he was a beautiful member, he could walk over there and put fifty dollars in the box. Whatever he do, it didn't make any difference, he's a good member. Buying his way! Hmm! See what I mean?

The churches, he said, no longer have the ability to deal effectively with alcoholism. The proof of this Bill sees in what is in fact the surprising number of Roman Catholic priests and nuns and Protestant ministers of all denominations who attend A.A. meetings to stay sober.

They go and have the priest pray for them. And then what the priest do? He got to come to A.A. to quit drinking! How come he don't pray for hisself? He's an alcoholic, he got to drink or do something about it. See? You don't trust him, and he don't trust hisself, he come over here, where living is good. Uh huh.

Goshen Bill was very much aware that even having a father who was a preacher, like he had, and being brought up in the heart of the church, could not keep an alcoholic like him from falling prey to the disease.

Bill became a carouser, a womanizer, and a truly outrageous habitual drunk. Eventually he just drifted from town to town, in and out of scrapes, and in and out of jail, taking great glee out of “putting one over on this person” or “getting away with that escapade there” by the strength of his own creativity and (often) sheer audacity.

His wife, of course, found herself sucked into the total insanity of what Bill was doing, as she attempted to cover for him and play the role of Rescuer, until their marriage had turned into what we could only call a bizarre form of *folie à deux*. Some alcoholics treat their spouses with extraordinary abuse— not necessarily physical attacks, but abusive behavior at the personal level — and that was the way Goshen Bill misused his long-suffering wife.

So I got home, and I got it open, and I drank that and went to sleep, and when I woke up, “What the hell am I doing here?” I got up, put my clothes on, and went down and caught me a bus and left. Huh! I didn’t appreciate nothing!

He not only treated his poor wife with total contempt, but took pride in his “ingenuity” in devising ways to sneak around and have affairs with other women without her finding out.

I went to see my girlfriend one night. And I had to kill my dog. *[Laughter]* Oh, we had a collie, you know, he was smart, you could make him roll over, you could make him stand up, and he’d stand on his hind feet and do his front feet that way. Lay a bottle cap on his nose, he’d throw it up and catch it. Oh, he was a cute dog.

So, [my wife] wanted me to take the kids out for a walk, and I told her I’d do it when I got back. So I got in the car, went to see my girlfriend. Right after I left, she said, “Let’s go get daddy,” and the dog got a switch in his tail, and she opened the door, and she followed the dog. He took her *right* to my girlfriend’s house.

And I was gonna take [the girlfriend] to the show, and when we got ready to come out, I ain’t got no car sitting there. So I called a cab, I went to the show, the hell with her! I went to the show.

And when I got home, [my wife] never said nothing about it, and I didn’t neither, but you know what I done? I bought *her* a car, so she won’t have to bother me and mine.

Bill was capable of going even further than this, in rubbing his wife’s nose into his affairs with other women:

I was out with a woman one night, and she was married, and she got hungry. We got to thinking about places that

was open, you know, that time of night, I would name this joint, she'd say, "No, my husband's friends go over there," and she'd name a joint, I'd say "No, my wife's friends go over there." So here we are, 'bout three o'clock in the morning, hungry, and got money in our pocket, and can't get in no place. I say, "*I know* what I can do," I say, "let's go to my house."

I took her over to my house, got my wife out of bed, and she fried us bacon and eggs at three o'clock in the morning. See? That's how insane you can get. Tell my own wife to get up and cook me and this woman something to eat!

Why do some practicing alcoholics have affairs on their spouses? All of them do not, by any means, probably the vast majority do not, but some do it in genuinely outrageous fashion. Alcoholics in general are apt to be addicted, not only to beverage alcohol, but also to thrill-seeking and danger, because it is another way of mood-altering and getting out of having to feel your own normal feelings. When the adrenaline starts flowing strongly enough, you can sometimes put yourself into what can only be called a kind of trance state — moving almost as though you are in a dream, with most of the normal rational controls blocked out of your surrealistically altered state of consciousness — which, as long as you are in it, gets you out of your own mind, with all its hellish fears and resentments.

Alcoholics also often tend to be childishly over-dependent on the co-dependent non-alcoholic who tries to act as their Rescuer and Caretaker. As the alcoholic gets in more and more trouble, he continues to expect the Caretaker figure (frequently a spouse) to cover for him, to fix it up again, to be unfailingly sympathetic and always figure out exactly the right words to make him feel better about himself. Since the alcoholic can eventually figure out how

to go further than any Caretaker alive could figure out how to go, the alcoholic then (in totally unreasonable fashion) starts developing a powerful resentment against the “failed” Caretaker. In the inner fantasies of the person playing Victim, the Rescuer will always eventually get turned into the Persecutor. “She (or he) could rescue me from even this latest irresponsible act *if she really wanted to*, so she is the one who is responsible for all my unhappiness and misery.”

This gives the alcoholic a beautiful internal excuse for being vindictive — *and one especially cruel way to be vindictive towards a spouse is to go have an affair*. Furthermore, alcoholics are egomaniacs, so those who have affairs can get a perversely satisfying ego thrill out of “putting one over” on his or her spouse (or the spouse of the person with whom you are having the illicit secret affair!).

### **Al-Anon and the alcoholics’ spouses**

The abusive alcoholic is often caught in a relationship of resentful, neurotic overdependency on his spouse. When this happens, the spouse in turn will be caught up into a kind of codependent behavior which is just as sick and neurotic in its own way as what the alcoholic is doing. Perhaps the older terms Rescuer and Enabler are clearer ways of describing what the non-alcoholic spouse ends up doing in this common type of alcoholic marriage. The alcoholic plays helpless Victim as a continuous con game — it is a trick because the one playing Victim deliberately avoids doing anything to get out of being helpless and needy, and will sabotage any genuinely useful help over and over again — and the non-alcoholic gets sucked into the con and continually tries to play Rescuer.



And if it is not this distorted overdependent-codependent relationship with all its continuous rescuing and enabling, there will of necessity be some other kind of neurotic need in the non-alcoholic spouse which the drunk is supplying. The non-drinking person may often have a catastrophically low self-esteem. These people do not believe that they are worthy of anything except abusive treatment at the hands of a drunk. They fall into this pattern in relationship after relationship because it feels familiar and, in its own sick way, comfortable.

Sometimes the non-alcoholic member of the relationship is not only a Rescuer but also an unbearably bossy and controlling know-it-all, who believes that he or she has a duty to fix everybody else and tell them how to run their lives. No one sober would be able to put up with the continuous nagging and criticism and giving of orders, so they seek out people to marry who stay so drunk that they are mostly oblivious to the abusive treatment.

But there are also many other things that can be going on. The Victim-Rescuer con game can sometimes even be played in reverse, where the alcoholic continually tries to rescue or enable a non-alcoholic who prefers to play the poor helpless Victim with people who are too drunk to catch on to the con.

And other kinds of combinations can also appear. Shy, timid people may marry the kind of drunks who are aggressive loud-mouths, to serve as their "front." A woman who is herself filled with a good deal of anger against the world may marry a man who is a vicious and violent drunk in much the same spirit in which some dangerously angry people keep vicious attack dogs as pets, so they can frighten the other people around them and sic their personal pit bull killer dog on anyone they want to attack. A woman (or man) who is filled with repressed rebelliousness against

moral and/or social strictures can marry an alcoholic to vicariously act out the rebellion. The non-alcoholic woman (or man) will delight secretly in the other person's escapades while outwardly condemning them as "terrible," and get the thrill of participating in the rebellion while still retaining his or her own public image as a proper and highly moral and responsible person. "He took me into that bar with him, and I was just so mortified by his behavior" — this self-righteous protest is total nonsense of course — she *knew*, and knew good and well, that he was going to drink and act that way.

But whatever is going on, as Goshen Bill pointed out, the non-drinking spouse will need Al-Anon *even more than* the drinking spouse needs A.A. But Bill gave another warning too: if the non-alcoholic tries to hound and nag the alcoholic into A.A., and then tries to "help" the alcoholic work his program by generously pointing out his gravest character defects to him, and so forth ("for his own good," of course!) it will always backfire — and the same totally negative results will occur if *the alcoholic* tries to "fix" *the non-alcoholic partner*, by continually badgering and pestering the other person to start going to Al-Anon, or by trying to point out that person's moral and psychological flaws.

Nobody else'll work your program but you. You know, we got the place now, we got alcoholics and we got Al-Anon. And the drinking spouse, he go to A.A., and she go to Al-Anon. But if she start trying to work his program, he start trying to work hers, ain't neither one of 'em gonna make it, if they listen to each other.

And the Al-Anon was sicker than the alcoholic, or else she'd a left him! And nine times out of ten, if a woman marry an alcoholic, stay with him a while, if she lose him, she'll marry another alcoholic. Why? She's used to that.

This is the hardest point to get across: as they say in A.A. circles, the non-alcoholic partners in alcoholic marriages are sicker than the sick. The alcoholics have the partial alibi that they were drunk out of their minds when they did their most outrageous things. The non-alcoholics are so mentally ill that they not only put up with the alcoholic's most outrageous behavior but end up — stone, cold sober — doing even crazier things themselves.

And why does the typical non-alcoholic take up over and over again with mates who act that way? If you study the various kinds of abuse and psychologically demoralizing situations these non-alcoholics invariably were subjected to as small children, Goshen Bill says it all with simple eloquence: “Why? She’s used to that.” Her whole life long, *that’s all she’s ever known*.

It is sometimes said by A.A. people that “alcoholism is the only disease that convinces you that you’re not ill.” By this they are referring to the powerful denial and minimization mechanisms that make it so difficult for alcoholics to get to the point of making an honest First Step and admitting that they actually are alcoholics, who are personally helpless and powerless before their disease. But the things going on in the heads of non-alcoholics who marry alcoholics will invariably represent some kind of spiritual-psychological illness too, and it *also* is a disease that convinces you that *you* are the one who is sane and healthy and responsible, even when you are obviously not only living in an insane environment but committing yourself ever more deeply to its perpetuation.

What makes it harder for non-alcoholics to realize that they are so extremely ill, is that as the alcoholics’ behavior degenerates,

more and more people who see the alcoholics in action begin to condemn their drunken behavior. But at the same time, the non-alcoholics will often receive greater and greater praise for being “saints” and “martyrs” and “responsible” and so on. This is heady stuff, so the non-alcoholics tend to become more and more smug and self-congratulatory — at least on one plane, because simultaneously, at a deeper level, they are progressively becoming more and more tortured by a sense of guilt, failure, futility, and abandonment anxiety.

The initial important message that has to be delivered to most newcomers to Al-Anon is a simple one. It does not always strike to the heart of the distorted relationship, but the majority of the time, it will be the best starting point:

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### **The First Three Rules for Al-Anons**

First, abandon any attempt to keep the alcoholic sober; force that responsibility onto the alcoholics themselves.

Second, to aid in that, quit covering for the alcoholics, making excuses for them, pulling them out of jams, and rescuing them from the consequences of their alcoholic behavior.

Third, start working on your own sense of self-worth and self-esteem, until you start realizing that you too have a right to enjoy things, a right to relax sometimes, and a right to stop regarding yourself as perpetually responsible for everything other people think or feel.

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But above all, the very first thing that has to be said to new Al-Anons is, *no matter what the alcoholics in your life are saying to you to the contrary*, THEIR PROBLEMS ARE NOT YOUR FAULT. Alcoholics who have actually gotten some recovery under their belts will be the first to assure you that this is one hundred percent correct. Any one of these alcoholics will tell you that, while he or she was still drinking, “I totally created my own problems, and I did not start recovery until I took responsibility for myself, and started working the A.A. program, not for you or anybody else, but for myself. When I was still drinking, and told you that you were the cause of my problems, I was not just lying to you, I was lying to myself and being dishonest with myself. *My problems were not your fault*, THEIR SOLUTION WAS NOT YOUR RESPONSIBILITY.”

**The continuing downhill slide:  
not CARING any longer**

In Goshen Bill, there was a generalized ego thrill, back in his drinking days, not only from putting one over on his wife, but also from “outwitting” authority figures of all sorts, and “bearding them in their dens,” and getting away with it. Policemen and jail guards and judges played a large role as authority figures in his compulsive acts of rebellion against the world. Goshen Bill tells a marvelous tale about his adventures in New Castle, Indiana at one point in his drinking career:

Over there to New Castle, I was in jail there. And they had a place they called Bill’s Bar, was right at the back of the jail — when the sheriff backed out, if he’d go straight across, he’d run into this tavern. And my buddy was there. He come up to visit me, and he gave me a long piece of

twine, you know, reach from the second floor down. He say, “Every morning,” he say, “when I come down to open up,” say, “you let this string down, and I’ll tie you some whiskey on it.” And it took ’em three days to get me sober enough to go before the judge! *[Laughter]* See, they won’t have you tried if you’re drunk!

And he’d tie it on, and I’d be pulling it up, you know, and the wind ’d get to blowing, it’d act like a pendulum. I didn’t want it to hit that brick building — do, that’s it [for that glass bottle]. And I’d get ’er up there, and I’d drink it, and they’d call me down, I’d be drunk. Go back.

Done that for three days, and they finally caught on to it. Then they went over and told him that if he give me any more whiskey, they’d close him up, so I got sober enough to have a trial. I didn’t care.

*“I didn’t care,”* Goshen Bill said. This is part of what it means to be an alcoholic. Past a certain point in your downhill slide, it matters less and less what other people think about your behavior, and less and less what is obviously happening to you. You are destroying yourself, you are literally killing yourself (even if much of it is a slow, inch by inch process), and you *know* this — but *you don’t care*. This is part of the insanity of the disease, and the pathological effect of the alcohol on the brain.

And I’d go in the tavern, I’d go around and park in the back. But when I’d get drunker, I’d go out front. And I couldn’t find my car, and I’d call the police, tell ’em my car was stolen! *[Laughter]* And they’d ride me around, then they’d say, “Where did we pick you up?” Cincincy Place. Go there, and go around the back, there it is! I’ve joy rided a lot of times, looking for my car.

One night, I got ready to go from Roxanne's Club, there in Fort Wayne. And it was upstairs, and had miniature golf, and all that stuff, and plenty of whiskey. My car was parked out front. At the bottom of the steps they had a door, like they have here, you know. And when I reached to shove the door, the police on the outside, pulling, that made me fall right in his arms. He say, "Oh, I didn't have to go up to get you this time." It made it easy for him. He say, "Where you going?" I say, "I'm going home."

So I got my keys out. He say, "You ain't gonna drive, are you?" I say, "Sure, too far to walk." He say, "I'm gonna do you a favor," he say, "I'm gonna let you drive." He said, "I'm gonna be right behind you, and if you just do *anything* wrong," say, "you will not drive for a year." And I said, "That's the bet." [Laughter] And I got in the car and drove home. I didn't have no trouble. I pulled up in the driveway. They went on. You know what I did? Backed out and went to another tavern. The hell with 'em! [Laughter] Yeah, I didn't care. Uh uh.

This is one of the sure signs of the disease, and one of the deadliest parts of it. *You cease to care anymore what happens to you.* Goshen Bill tells one truly horrendous story about the level to which he had sunk during his period in Ohio:

We had an undertaker, over there at Dayton, he sold whiskey and he had a canopy running from the back of his house out to the garage. And he bootlegged on Sunday. That was good business — give 'em whiskey, and let 'em get drunk and die — and then they get the body! So that Sunday morning, I was scratching around, and got enough to get me a pint — they didn't have half pints in Ohio — and where they would get you, if you broke the seal, you'd better drink all of it, 'cause if they catch you with one with

some of the whiskey out and a broken seal, you still got to go to jail.

So, I went in, and I bought it. Come out, went through his garage, and I got to there, there I looked both ways, I didn't see a damn soul *no place*. I broke the cap, and I got it jest about to . . . *Whack!* . . . uh oh, and I could see that gold [badge] here, and I looked down and I said, "what about that large Irishman?"

He say, "Gimme that bottle." I say, "What're you gonna do with it." He say, "I'm gonna pour it out." I said, "Don't do that," I said, "I ain't got no more money." I said, "Tell you what I'll do," I say, "you give me that bottle, let me get one drink out of it, and I don't care what you do — with the liquor nor me." And he handed me that bottle, and I ripped it down right 'bout like that.

Bill drank the entire pint of raw, cheap whiskey down without taking the bottle from his lips. It took a brief time before the impact of all that alcohol hit his system, and so he had a short period of triumph, standing there facing the Irish policeman with the now empty bottle in his hand.

And he put his hand on his hip, and he shook his head, he said, "Where do you live?" I said, "In the next block." He said, "You go home."

And I turned around to go home, and I fell, and I couldn't get up, and you know I crawled all the way home on my hands and knees, you know, and I picked glass out of me for a year! Some would be yellow, some would be pink, some would be blue — oh man, I had a beautiful decoration of glass when I got through picking it out. You see, the glass will work back to the surface, and if it can't break through, it'll go back — it never stay still. And as it come to the surface, well, I'd pick it out. And I had all colors in



that bowl. I had a bowl full of glass. But, I didn't care. I didn't want him to throw my liquor away. I was willing to pay the consequences, I didn't care what it was.

In some puzzling fashion, the normal human survival instinct seems to become almost totally suppressed. The typical alcoholic is, as A.A. people often put it, "an egomaniac with an inferiority complex." There is an enormous, self-destructive internal synergism between, on the one hand, an egomania and overweening grandiosity which convinces alcoholics they can do anything and get away with it, and on the other hand, such a catastrophically low self-esteem and sense of self-worth that the alcoholics do not believe it matters anyway whether they kill themselves doing it. Goshen Bill talked about both members of that unholy pair in his lead: the ego thrill of "getting away with something," joining hands in evil and destructive fashion with the dark, overwhelming conviction that life was worthless and that he himself was worthless also. *You don't care* anymore, once you are convinced you are worthless:

I run my car in the river, taking a drink, and I can't swim. It was my dad's fault — you know why I say that? — he told me, you stay out of that water until you learn how to swim. How in the hell you gonna do . . . ? I ain't gonna learn how to swim if you don't get in the water! [*Laughter*] So I blame him for me not knowing how to swim.

So, I managed to get out. They called a wrecker and they got it out. I got me some oil cloth, put over the seats, got in it, and hell, I didn't care whether it was wet or not, it wasn't gonna get to me, I had myself protected. And two nights later, I run in the river, the same place, taking a drink. *I didn't care*. I had no respect for myself, and nobody else.

If you are a person who has no real respect for yourself, you will not have any real respect for anybody else either — not your spouse, nor your children, nor your employer, nor your fellow-employees or customers, or other automobile drivers on the highway, or anyone else at all. Two of the traditional deadly sins are apt to get mixed in with this — Envy and Anger — to produce a particularly deadly mixture. Goshen Bill talked about experiencing episodes of the same kind of rage-filled envy that Nick Kowalski also mentioned in his leads, an anger emerging out of what was, down deep, an uncontrollable self-loathing and sense of personal failure:

And if it was anybody that acted kind of funny, look out! I'd get even with 'em. *He think he's better than I.* He was! That's what made me mad.

I was going down the street one Christmas Eve night, drunk, no place to go, 'cause I wouldn't stay home. And [in one of the houses I passed, I looked through their window, and] there was a fellow, that had a big Christmas tree and, you know, one of those *big* women, you know. And I'm looking at 'im, he was down on his hands and knees, and had a little girl on his shoulders, giving her a horse ride, you know, and he would "buck."

If I'd had a gun, I'd a' killed that man! [*Laughter*] *He think he's better than me.* And he don't even know I'm out there! Cold, fingers froze, and his house was so nice and cozy, and he had a fireplace, you know, those artificial fireplaces and that blaze going up through those logs, and it was so cold. I'd a killed that man, so help me, if I'd a had a gun! I was mad at him for having what I ought to have.

But if Envy is often (as both Goshen Bill and Nick Kowalski felt) one of the major roots of the alcoholic's destructive behavior,

then how is it to be healed? According to Goshen Bill, part of the way alcoholics start healing this character defect is to start *learning to be responsible* FOR THEMSELVES. If the things you want so much are in fact obtainable by doing some honest work, and following the boss's orders, and keeping an eye on the real end result you are trying to obtain, then *you need to go do your own work and earn those things in reality* — instead of daydreaming, and jumping into half-baked get-rich-quick schemes and cons, and drowning yourself into oblivion in an alcoholic fantasy world, and continually blaming some person whom you decided was supposed to be your magic caretaker for not supplying your every wish and desire instantly.

I wanted all the nice things the man in that snug, warm house seemed to have, Goshen Bill said, . . .

. . . but I wasn't doing anything about it. The bootleggers had all that. They had Cadillacs, home, and everything else. Color TV. I didn't have nothing. And I'd get mad at them.

But, I was responsible. I was responsible, taking that first drink. See? And after that first drink, a hundred ain't enough. You just got to go till you get broke, put in jail, or pass out.

But as long as you could breathe, you'd take another drink. I've got so drunk, and would want a drink, I could just take the cap off and smell it, put the cap back on. I just loved the *smell* of it. I was too full to drink. Just smell it, and that would stimulate me a little bit, see. *[Laughter]*

### **Hitting bottom and coming into the A.A. program**

It was around 1964 when Goshen Bill finally hit the end of the line.<sup>62</sup> Bill had heard about Alcoholics Anonymous, but for a long

time refused to have anything to do with it, because he mistakenly thought that it was part and parcel of the prohibition movement — that it was at least covertly tied in with the organizations of puritanical bluenoses (as Bill regarded them) who were fanatically striving to pass laws against the sale and production of alcoholic beverages everywhere across the country.

I wouldn't let nobody talk to me about A.A. No! didn't want nothing to do with it. Why? I thought that was a branch off of the W.C.T.U., the "Woman's Christian Temporal Union" or something like that. And they was out to dry up the world, and I'm an alcoholic — I didn't want this world dried, so I wasn't gonna listen to that stuff.

But it was around 1964, when Bill finally hit his bottom. He was supposed to be living in Goshen by now, but in fact was involved at this point in time in a series of escapades in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He was sleeping in the mud and gravel in the back of an old dump truck, soaked in his own urine, and finally he surrendered psychologically and his overweening ego shattered to pieces, and he realized that he could not go on any further. Since the jails are the psychiatric hospitals and drying out centers of the poor, Goshen Bill went down to the Fort Wayne city jail and tried to get them to lock him up.

Now ironically, it was the police — those "symbols of authority" whom Goshen Bill had flaunted and taunted for so long — who in fact turned out to be the heroes. (There is a valuable moral here — all practicing alcoholics are invariably badly confused about who their real friends are and who their real enemies are.) The first cop he approached tried to run him off, but one of the detectives coming into the station house saw Bill, and

instantly acted with enormous compassion and wisdom and gently led Bill to a nearby A.A.-run facility, pointed him towards the door, and told him quietly that these were the people who could actually help him.

And Goshen Bill went in, and his life was saved, and the agent of his salvation was a member of a group which he had always dealt with before then by conning them, manipulating them, hating them and despising them. We have to surrender our egos to make it into the program successfully, because everything in our distorted alcoholic egos believes that the very people who are going to save our lives are knaves, fools, simple-minded idiots, or prissy and intolerantly self-righteous blockheads.

I got sick, I got broke. Say, I was a sad sack. I was in Fort Wayne, but I lived in Goshen. I don't know how long I been there. I was sleeping on a dump truck, and it was loaded with old red gravel, you know, that red clay and gravel, and the rain had seeped through and the bottom of it leaked, and I had on a light grey suit, and you know just about how I looked. All that red stuff all over me. And they didn't have any plumbing under that truck, so you know just about how I rolled around, and I was *a mess*!

And I said, "Well, I got to do something." So — don't want to call the madam — I'd used her too much. I'd used it up. So, I run my hand in my pocket and I found half a dollar. "What're you doing in there! Let me start looking!" And I kept looking, I found a dollar and thirty cents. And that was it. That's all I had. And I could get a half a pint of Dark Eye [brand of cheap vodka] for a dollar and a quarter, so I did, I bought it.

I drank it down and started walking, going to police headquarters to get locked up so I can get where I'm not drinking. When I got there, had to walk up a flight of steps.

I got up there, and he was talking to one of the cruisers, you know, so I just set there, and man, I took and put my hand on my elbow like that, and uhn, it'd slip off and I'd bump my damn chin on the . . . I was in a hell of a shape, I had no control over nothing!

And when he got through talking, he said, "What can I do for you?" I say, "I want you to lock me up for thirty, sixty, or ninety days," I say, "I got to get off this liquor." You know what he told me? "Get the hell out of here!" Hmmp! Man, ain't fit to be put in jail! Ain't that awful? Hmh? *He* didn't want me to contaminate his jail, he had a clean jail, he didn't want old dirty me in there.

So, I got no place to go, nobody I can call, and I went walking down those steps, holding onto that handrail to keep from falling. Down at the bottom of the steps . . . seed a detective coming, he looked at me, he said "What you need is A.A." I said, "Where will you find it?" He took me to the door, and he showed me the — what the hell was the name of that, Billy? it wasn't Gallagher's, but something like that — but anyway, that's where the headquarters of A.A. was. He told me to go in there.

And I went in there and I met this counselor, and she signed me up. We had to tell a lie to get me — I didn't want to go to Westville, didn't want to go to Logansport — so we had to say I lived in Fort Wayne in order to get me sent to Richmond. So I had to *lie to get into A.A.!* Heh, heh, heh, heh! So they sent me down to Richmond.

Richmond, Indiana, is in a different world, much further south, down in the middle part of the state, about fifty miles east of Indianapolis, where the local accents are sometimes already beginning to display a faint southern twang in the way vowels are pronounced. Indiana is divided into two halves, where if you keep on going even further south, the people in the extreme lower part

of the state talk just like people from the southern part of the United States, and can even on occasion be seen displaying the old Confederate battle flag.

Nevertheless, to avoid having to go to the places where they used to put alcoholics in Westville or Logansport up in northern Indiana — both of which places represented the sort of institutionalization which he wanted to avoid at all costs — Richmond is where Goshen Bill went. Once in the treatment center there, he soon recovered enough to try to start up his old games once again. The initial reaction of all alcoholics to A.A. or a treatment center is to see it as just another challenge to their creative minds: How can I surreptitiously seize control and start manipulating this new situation? And like many people who come into alcoholism treatment centers, Bill down deep saw it only as a place to get rested up a little, in a place where he would be taken care of without having to do any work or be responsible, until he felt good enough to go back out and start drinking again.

Even more importantly, as a neurotic “rebel against all authority,” Goshen Bill had to spot someone there who seemed to be functioning as an authority figure, and figure out some way of making that person look silly. So Bill got hold of a copy of *Playboy* magazine with large color photographs of naked women in provocative poses, and decided to use that to make his first covert challenge.

I just wanted to get sober enough to drink some more, you know, and I had to go to meetings. Started their meeting one night, went through the reading room, and there was one of those *Playboy* magazines, “Oh, I’ll take this with me.” I took it to the meeting. And you know that pretty folding page they got in the middle? I ripped her

open, you know, holding her up so the guys could see me. Oh, that was a beautiful picture! And this counselor, she saw it. And she pointed her finger at me, she said, “William Henry Caldwell,” she said, “I don’t give a *damn* if you *don’t* come to another meeting.” She say, “*You* don’t want it, and you don’t want nobody else to have it.”

Aghk!! I built myself a *huge resentment*. “I’ll get even with her! I’ll be here every time she open the door.” I thought I’d make her mad! And I sat on the edge of my chair — I wanted her to say a *little something* else to hurt my *little feelings* so I could cut her out and go home. See, you can go home anytime you want to, but you can’t come back.

But in an A.A.-based program, things start happening quickly to undercut all these standard alcoholic behaviors. Part of it comes from having *recovering alcoholics* do all or most of the important talking. The alkie quickly discovers that these are not naïve marks and self-righteous do-gooders, but *people who have been exactly where he has been*. The lesson was driven home almost immediately to Goshen Bill in especially vivid fashion:

So, I sat there and I listened. And the first speaker we had was a man from Fort Wayne, and he and I used to drink together and . . . I drank his buddy to death, he died trying to keep up with me, I guess.

And what happened, we went out and we drank all we could, and we got a fifth to go home. We got home, we couldn’t undress, so we just fell across the bed and went to sleep. And I woke up the next morning, had about that much in that fifth, and I want to call my good buddy, split with him, you know, and I couldn’t wake him up, I said, “Hell with him!” so I drank it. And I went and *got another*



*drink*, come back, he was dead! That's the reason he didn't wake up, see?

And it was his brother that give the first lead down there at this Richmond place. And I say, "Uh oh, I know there's got to be some money involved, or he wouldn't be here." I knew him that well. He wouldn't do . . . he wouldn't give you a cigarette, he'd sell you one! [*Laughter*] Yeah, he was that money-hungry.

He come and he give a lead, and when they set the basket out, bam! he throwed a dollar in it. I say, "Uh huh, I'm gonna watch this bastard, 'cause I know how crooked he is." [*Laughter*] And I never took my eye off of that basket.

He come over and talked to me, and hand *me* a dollar, and told me, said, "Now you get yourself some paper and pencil, and put 'happy to write,' [and send a note to all] your friends when you get ready to leave so they can contact you."

So I said, "Well, I know it got to be something to it, or else *he* wouldn't be doing all this for nothing."

Alcoholics — master con-artists and angle-shooters that they are — are often inherently suspicious of any program they enter, because they assume that someone, some place in the system, has figured out a ploy to secretly lay his own sticky fingers on any money floating around. And contrariwise, when it finally began to sink in on Goshen Bill that the A.A. people did not want his money, were forbidden by the twelve traditions from owning buildings or accepting anything much beyond coffee money even from their own members (and nothing from anyone outside at all), that he began to realize for the first time, that maybe — just maybe — he had found another human being or two whom he could (for the first time in his life) actually *trust*.

Simple trust has to be the foundation stone for any program of real spiritual healing. “Trust” is what the word *pistis* in the New Testament actually means in present-day English,<sup>63</sup> even though this word is unfortunately usually translated as “faith,” and frequently therefore confused with believing in some intellectual system of doctrines and dogmas. But real trust is something much deeper than a mere intellectualization.

Until you can feel some real trust, you will be unable to begin to surrender your personal ego, and you will be unable to even start to let go of your continual attempts to control. Until you encounter that which you can finally *trust enough* to start letting go of the things you *think* you know, you will not be able to take the first plunge into a totally new dimension of existence — a realm of (ultimately) completely joyous and serene being and living, which the poor alcoholic, stuck inside his head in his own personal hell, has literally never ever experienced before. And until someone *you trust* first loves you even though you cannot love yourself, you cannot start learning to see yourself as inherently lovable.

## CHAPTER 16

# Goshen Bill: Fish Stories and Chickens Flying South

### Honesty vs. fantasy

In Chapter 5 in the Big Book, “How It Works,” the first paragraph puts the simple concept of honesty in the central position as the single absolutely necessary prerequisite to journeying along this spiritual path<sup>64</sup> — not “faith,” interestingly enough, nor “contrition” nor a “conversion experience” nor “obedience” nor donning a sacred robe and joining a monastery or a convent as a novice, nor a solemn promise or vow of any sort at all — not even belief in God. Alcoholics Anonymous seems at first glance to be radically different from nearly all of the other spiritual movements which have arisen down through history within traditional Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, or any of the other sizeable world religions.

But this is a message of incredible cheer to struggling alcoholics who come into A.A., because it makes it clear that they can walk through the door that enters into the new life and take the first healing steps along the way even if they have no faith in the principles of any formal religion — even if they no longer believe that there even is a God or universal spiritual principle out there anywhere.

Self-honesty has to be the starting point because practicing alcoholics live perpetually in a world of fantasy. Their ideas about what the world is like, and who they themselves really are, and what is genuinely important for a truly satisfying life, are a fantastic and imaginary tissue of illusion, denial, and introjected material from childhood parental and caretaker figures. Healing begins when the alcoholic can be encouraged to start testing the fantasy against reality, a little bit at a time, asking the alcoholic first of all the simple pragmatic question: the fantasy you are clinging to, tooth and nail, sounds very good, and says that thus-and-so is what *should* happen when you do such-and-such — but what do you *honestly* find happens *in reality* every time?

At the very beginning of his lead at the alcoholism treatment center in Elkhart, Goshen Bill introduced this honesty-fantasy antithesis (one of the two or three major themes of his message that night) with a little joking “fish story.” With some fishermen, every time they tell the tale of how they caught a certain fish, the fish becomes at least an inch longer and a pound heavier, until reality is left far behind. In the joke he told to start off his lead, Bill said he once knew a man who caught a fish *so big*, he knew his friends would never believe him if he tried to tell them about it later. He was going to have to have some proof:

He says, “Well suh, I’ll take a picture of ’im and show it to ’em.” He took a picture, and you know what? That picture so heavy, till the *picture* weighed five pounds!  
[Laughter]

See what I mean? So that must a been a heavy fish. That’s a fish story. *But . . .* we [alcoholics are the ones who really] live in a world of fantasy.

I build more homes than anybody else that I think I know. It would be everything automatic, everything was

just perfect. But who's living in it? The psychiatrist and the doctor, they're living in that house I was building. See, because I'd have to go to them for treatment, so I could keep drinking, and they build the house out of the money that I should've built mine out of.

So, I found out daydreaming was no good.

*Achievement fantasies:* Particularly when they are in their cups, alcoholics dream grandiose visions of success in large screen Technicolor format to rival Hollywood's greatest screen epics. Whether it is money, fame, selling a deal, winning an argument, being the most beautiful, sexy woman or the most macho, athletic man in the place, getting hideous revenge on someone else, or what have you, they drink and dream, and then just drink some more. The fantasy finally becomes so real to the alcoholic, that he comes to act as though getting honest and letting go of it would be to abandon the actual reality of the things he imagines — that is, he behaves as though he actually *possessed these things already* in real life.

If a person were living in a beautiful multimillion dollar mansion on a sixty-five acre forested estate, and someone suggested to the person that the whole place should be burned down to the ground and then abandoned, that person would react with total horror. An alcoholic sleeping on a dollar-a-night bed in an inner city rescue mission reacts the same way to any threats to his fantasy that someday soon (when he pulls off his next “deal”) he will actually be living in that beautiful mansion. He is appalled by any plea that he abandon all his embittered feelings that he *ought* to be living in that palatial home right now, because (to his mind) he would *already* be living there now, if he hadn't “just had

a piece of really *bad luck*,” or if “so-and-so hadn’t *done him wrong*.”

The skid row bum’s reaction would be perfectly *sane* if he *actually possessed in reality* the things he only dreams about — or if he even had any realistic chance of achieving them. But they are illusions, delusions, and excuses which exist only in his mind, and so his reaction seems bizarre to people who are in better touch with reality.

An alcoholic need not be a skid row bum to become lost in a phantasmagoric maze of imaginary “will be’s” and “ought to have been’s.” The grotesque and apparently inexplicable way in which the alcoholic rejects any pragmatic advice — “to cut your losses and move on,” “to pick a different set of goals,” “to bite the bullet and deal with where you really are at,” “to start feeling more grateful for what you *do* have” — comes because reality and fantasy have become so blurred together in his or her muddled mind, that the alcoholic actually at one level thinks the fantasy is real.

*“Fun” fantasies:* Another fantasy that alcoholics have to talk out over and over again in recovery, is the illusion that they were having tremendous “fun” when they were drinking, or that having a drink made them “feel better” when they were miserable or upset. Our whole American culture conspires to produce this illusion. The television commercial portrays athletic, muscular, handsome young men and beautiful, blonde, sexy young women with perfect bodies shown off in brief bikinis, playing a joyful and vigorous game of volleyball on a beach, with a cooler full of such-and-such brand beer sitting in the foreground. In the detective novels, one person is extremely distressed or distraught, and someone else says, “here, I’ll pour you a drink,” and then the person (at least in imaginative fiction) “feels better.” For

alcoholics, that was certainly not the way life really was by the end of their drinking careers.

These fantasies have to be contaminated with a dose of healthy, pragmatic reality. As Goshen Bill pointed out in his lead, in fact *it was rough*, and *wasn't really fun at all*:

I can tell you how rough it was then, when I thought I was having “fun,” but it wasn’t no fun. I heard a man say, the only fun he had when he was drinking, was from the time he took his first drink till he puked, he said, and the fun was over! *[Laughter]* ‘Cause puking is the hardest job you ever tried. I don’t care what kind of work you get into, puking is a hard job. And when you get so you say “Nghnnnguh,” and there ain’t nothing down there to throw up, then you’re sick, buddy! *[Laughter]*

And if you’re an alcoholic, you know what I’m talking about — you been there! If you’re not, you don’t know how I feel.

The only route out of the alcoholic nightmare is to start getting honest:

You got to change your habits. You ever try changing one of your habits? It’s kind of rough, ain’t it? But you keep practicing, you can do it. Practice these principles in all of your affairs — not just when you come around here.

You know you can go to hell for lying, just as good as you can for killing people. It’s all the same, a sin’s a sin — ain’t no little white lie, little black lie. A lie is a lie and the truth is the truth.

*Honest*: if you’re incapable of being *honest*, forget this program, ‘cause you can’t make it! Hmm? Oh you can talk, you know, man, you can just talk hell out of it. But

you ain't *doing* it, and you're gonna fall. You *got* to. What you got to hang to? Hmm?

Alcoholic fantasies invariably seem to involve the simultaneous achievement of goals that cannot possibly coexist with one another. Part of getting honest, Goshen Bill said, was realizing that there are some fundamental *either-or's* that have to be confronted. And Bill said that to start off with, before looking at anything else, the alcoholic must come to realize that *right and wrong do not mix*.

You ever take water and gasoline, and put it in a bottle and shake? When you set it down again, it goes to the top and water goes to the bottom. See? It don't mix. Right and wrong don't mix. Uh uh.

But past that point, alcoholics in their fantasies are always trying to be things they are not, and never can be. And so they continually oscillate between attempts to drive themselves (with inner mental whiplashes and desperate pep talks) into attempting some grandiose goal once again — and screwing up once again (and maybe even doing serious harm to themselves in the process) — and then collapsing into feelings of utter failure and despair once more. And then after lying there like that for a while, they start kicking themselves until they can make themselves get up and start the cycle all over again yet one more time.

You take an old hen, you set her on a dozen eggs, and six of 'em are duck eggs and the other six is chicken eggs, and she got to sit there a full week to get those duck eggs out. And when she get those duck eggs out, and they're playing around, and here's a little pool over here, the ducks'll go in



the pool. Did you ever see a chicken go in there after 'em?  
Why? He know he can't swim.

*People-pleasing fantasies:* The so-called dumb animals know better than to try to be something they are not — but not the poor muddled alcoholic! And people-pleasing makes it worse. The first level of fantasy comes when we delude ourselves into thinking that we not only *should* do something, but actually *could* do it, just because someone else seems to want us to — and that if we do not do it, “maybe they might not love us, or let us be with them anymore.” The deeper level of this fantasy is the fey belief that I can go through life pleasing the other people around me *all the time*, “if I just try hard enough.” But the bedrock foundation of this set of layered fantasies is the totally mistaken belief that if I achieved all that, that I would then be totally happy and satisfied, and could live with myself contentedly.

Larry W., one of the South Bend–Elkhart–Goshen A.A. wise men, said simply that being a practicing alcoholic always involved some kind of gross *self-betrayal*. He remembered his sponsor Ernie Gerig of Toledo — one of the grand old timers who got sober in the original Akron group — saying to him when he first came into the program, “You will never need to betray yourself again.”<sup>65</sup> A chicken is too smart to try to pretend to be a duck or a goose. An eagle who pretends to be a goose also betrays himself.

You ain't going to catch a chicken flying south with geese.  
He know he can't make it — and *he* don't try. But no, *we*  
try to please people. We was people-pleasers. If they said,  
“You can walk that wire,” you'd try your best if it broke  
your neck. If you'd fall and break your hip, you'd still try  
to do it. Pleasing people. But you're tearing *yourself* up.

And Goshen Bill inserted two additional very wise words of warning at this point: The first was that you cannot work the A.A. program successfully over the long haul if you turn that also into *just another exercise in people-pleasing*, where your only reason for trying to stay sober is an attempt to please and placate your spouse or your parents or your parole officer. The second warning was that you *must not* hero worship the old timers who have been sober for many years, and start trying to stay sober because, and only because, you want to “please them” and you want them to “like you.” Because then, if that old-timer gets screwy and goes out and gets drunk, you’ll end up going out and getting drunk yourself! And Goshen Bill was one of these legendary old-timers himself, so he was warning people about him too: *do not* go around trying to show off in front of me, and trying to convince me “how hard you’re trying” and “how sincere you are” because you think it will please me and make me like you.

And you can be on the program, trying to please people, and they’ll get you drunk if you’ll let ’em. Uh huh! Don’t build anybody up too high. I don’t care how many years you been sober. It’ll only take one drunk to do it. The further you get away from your last drink, the closer you’re getting to the next one, if you’re gonna take one. Because it’s always gonna be here.

There is an old A.A. slogan, still seen posted up on the walls in some of the meeting rooms in the St. Joseph river valley area: THINK, THINK, THINK. Many practicing alcoholics have little or no impulse control, and when the typical alcoholic acts on the blind impulse of the moment, it will always be the old, sick fantasies that are shaping the entire response. THINK, THINK,

THINK means stop for a few moments and start asking some questions: what old tapes are starting to play in my internal repertory of behaviors? That is, what old fantasies are sucking me in once again?

In his lead, Goshen Bill reminds people, “You don’t have to do things” just because somebody else said so. Somebody asks you to do something, or demands that you do it, or dares you to do it, and “you just go ahead and do it.”

If your mind needed you to do something . . . . Think it over before you [do it], don’t do it on impulse. You might have another thought: “Well, I better not do that. What would it do to my sobriety?” Better think of that! ’Cause there’s a whole lot of propositions sound real good till you get into ’em. Then you say, “Oh, oh, I wished I hadn’t a done that.” And if you’d listened to that small voice you wouldn’t. Uh huh.

*Fantasizing within the spiritual life:* One very interesting issue that Goshen Bill included in his talk under the theme of getting honest was to demolish some of the common religious fantasies about what it means “to love God.” The minute the idea of God enters the picture, the human mind is apt to start going off into wish-fulfillment fantasies and naive magical beliefs with unbelievable speed. One of the simplest and easiest of these fantasies to fall into is the belief that “loving God” means cultivating a particular kind of vague, warm glow inside when I use the word “God” in church or synagogue or mosque, and putting a pious expression on my face, and talking about “how much I love God,” and just feeling really pleased with myself because I can manipulate my own emotions to produce this kind of vague, warm, unfocused, sentimentalistic feeling inside. Goshen

Bill tried to undermine this fantasy by pointing to the implacable truth contained in the reading for October 11 in the *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* book<sup>66</sup> used by nearly all of the good old timers in early St. Joseph river valley A.A.

First I must get right with other people and then I can get right with God . . . . “If a man say: ‘I love God’ and hateth his brother, he is a liar, for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”

In this meditation in *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, Richmond Walker is quoting from the New Testament, from 1 John 4:20, a short and succinct statement that is blunt, totally unambiguous, and does not allow for hemming and hawing and explaining away all our hostilities and attacks on other people with fancy “interpretations.” Goshen Bill was not the only great old-timer from the St. Joseph river valley who liked to cite this passage; Brownie in South Bend also regularly quoted from it.<sup>67</sup> It is a simple little test, but it can cut through an awful lot of fuzzy-minded fantasy if *honestly* applied! There are no exclusionary clauses in that simple little rule. If our minds are filled with anger and hatred towards other people around us, but we still talk all the time about how much we love God, *we are liars*. It does not matter how many arguments we can come up with trying to justify all that anger and hatred — “but you see, he did such-and-such to me first” or “of course I’m furious, it’s obvious that I’m right and she’s wrong” or “I have the right to be angry because they are not reading the Bible correctly” or “I have a duty to attack them and hate them because they immoral people who are living sinful lives, people who are violating all that is holy” — if I am standing

around claiming that I am doing this because I love God so much, *I am a liar*.

I don't care what club you belong to. The *fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous*. What it say? "Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship."

And if you say you love God and hate your brother, if you believe that, I'll tell you what to do — you just read the meditation for October 11th [in Richmond Walker's *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*], and it'll tell you where you stand, and say you're a liar and the truth ain't in you.

So, what 're you gonna do? You can't lie to him and say . . . ? How you goin' to lie to him when he made you? He know everything you goin' to do, from the time you were born until you die. Now how are you goin' to lie to him? He said, "I made you and I know you."

So, you can tell me some fancy tales, but it's only the truth that matters.

That is a perfect one-sentence summary of the one of the major themes of the lead Goshen Bill gave: "*You can tell me some fancy tales, but it's only the truth that matters.*" Alcoholics Anonymous is not a program of empty talk or unending intellectual debates or arguing about psychological/sociological theories. The word "fancy" in its present form is partially disguised by its modern, twentieth-century spelling, but in late medieval English it was still spelled "fantsy," and was just the word fantasy shortened down to two syllables. So when practicing alcoholics talk and talk and talk, their "fancy tales" are merely the verbalizations of the fantasies that make them sick.

Real healing starts when the first faint vestiges of real honesty begin to appear, and this new spirit of truthfulness starts

demystifying all the fancies and fantasies that turn somersaults or gnash their teeth or drift like brightly colored gossamer clouds within the alcoholic mind. When the newcomer first begins to embrace the principle that Goshen Bill stated so clearly here, that it's only the truth that matters, then this poor miserable person will be able to obtain long term sobriety, and start growing spiritually and healing psychologically, and so will be able ultimately to achieve the fullest fruits of the serenity, peace, joy, freedom, and happiness which the program solemnly promises.

### **Surrender**

The necessity of genuinely *surrendering* was another of the two or three major themes that ran through Goshen Bill's lead. You have to surrender to win. But what does this word surrender mean? In Arabic, the word *Islam* means "surrender" or total submission to God, and it was so much at the central core of the Prophet Mohammed's teaching in the Koran (the Moslem holy book), that the word "Islam" became used as the very name for the religion of the Prophet.

Some of the early analyses of the Alcoholics Anonymous version of this concept, by people who were psychiatrically trained, noted that nobody could successfully treat an alcoholic until there had been a catastrophic "ego deflation" first. This ego deflation, "hitting bottom" in A.A. lingo, was the necessary prerequisite to surrendering the megalomaniacal alcoholic ego to God.

In medieval Catholic Christianity, God himself was described as *verum ipsum* and *esse ipsum*, that is, as Truth Itself and Being Itself, so that to speak of abandoning your self-destructive and deluded fantasies and surrendering instead to Truth and Reality

was just an alternate way of talking about the act of submission to God.

But it has to be real surrender. We have to stop fighting God and put a permanent end to the war we have been fighting with him. We have to stop attacking everybody and everything around us, and declare a new world of peace. Goshen Bill told a tale to illustrate the difference between momentary situational acts of “giving up,” and genuine total personal surrender:

The alcoholic’s promises to quit, to change his whole way of life, if God will just get him out of jail or whatever, [do him no good.] I *thought* I meant it. And I *did*! But I hadn’t hit bottom. I hadn’t give it up. I didn’t surrender. You know, there’s a lot of difference in *giving up* and *surrendering*. You know that?

I found that out about two boys was fighting. One was a heavyset kid and the other a little skinny kid, about like I was. And whenever the girls come around, the big kid would knock the little one down, and beat him till he say he had enough, you know. [*Chuckling*] He’s showing off in front of the girls. So, finally one day the little guy’s girl was in the bunch, and this big guy got him down, and just whaling away at him, and he said, “I give up.” This boy got up off of ’em, and he reached and got a brick and knocked the holy hell out of ’em. [*Laughter*] He said, “Thought you said you give up?” and he say, “I did, but I didn’t *surrender*.” [*Laughter*]

See what I mean? You got to surrender to make this program. You don’t just give up. Anybody can give up! Uh huh, you can say, “I don’t want *another* drink!” How do you know? You’re an alcoholic, you’re gonna want it.

There’s only one way to remove the obsession to drink, only one way to get it done. And that’s through God —

God Himself is the only one that can remove the obsession to drink. People say, “I don’t want none of that God bit, you know, to get sober either.” [But that never works,] ’cause you can’t stay sober *by yourself* if you’re an alcoholic.

Real surrender comes only with the development of real humility, Goshen Bill said. The alcoholic is not helped by having a clever mind, by being smarter than everyone else around him, or by having diplomas and university degrees.

[The alcoholic] got to have *humility*. Without humility, you’re not goin’ to make this program. I don’t care who you are. I don’t care how much education you got.

Old King Saul [in the Old Testament], he went around prosecuting people all over — God could a killed him — but he had some work for him to do. He let him suffer. But when [Saul’s] mind got right, he hit him. First thing he say, “Lord, what’ll you have me to do?” “Huh uh” [God said], “I ain’t gonna tell you, you go on down there. [David] the man you was goin’ down to prosecute, go down there and he’ll tell you what to do.”

King Saul was the lord of all the land of Israel, and became so arrogant in the unlimited power he believed he held, that he began ignoring God’s guidance. He thought he controlled the world, so he could do what he wanted to do instead of what God wanted him to do. He decided on impulse one day that he was going to have his henchmen kill the powerless young David, the man he had hired to sing and play the harp in his palace, like someone stomping on an annoying bug crawling across the ground, even though David had been the one who had been calming him down and keeping him sane. But David, who was beloved by God,



continued to do what God told him to do and tried to keep on acting honorably, even though he was forced to flee into the hills and live a struggling outlaw existence.

By the end of the tale, Saul's power and arrogance had been totally destroyed, and little David — whom he had despised and tried to kill — had not only escaped from Saul's men with God's help, but ended up becoming king himself and ruling with a royal splendor that put all of Saul's pretensions to shame. At the end of Saul's life, he had a period in which his sanity partly returned, and he asked God for help, but God answered that he had already made his decision, and that Saul was going to die in battle, and David was going to take the throne in his place.

In ordinary American slang, the opposite of humility is trying to play “the big shot.” Alcoholics drink to make their fantasies of being big shots appear to be founded in truth and reality. At the real world level, they do not even notice that their lives are actually going down in rack and ruin.

When you're drinking, you're the biggest shot in town.  
You wanted everybody to know how big you was. You  
make an impression on people, instead of trying to take care  
of yourself.

A.A. will not work for people who just want to play being big shots. Getting the program is not a process of committing words and phrases to memory and repeating them back better than anybody else in the A.A. meeting; it is not an intellectual puzzle to be solved in order to impress other recovering alcoholics around the table.

It is not a matter of words and talk at all. A.A. is an action program — you only learn it by living it and doing it. The ultimate

test is always and only the pragmatic test: does it work in actual practice? What do those people around the table who actually stay sober *do* that those people who go back out and drink again *are not doing*?

And if you want this program . . . . you got to WANT it to WORK those steps. You might *learn* those steps — you can say 'em one right after the other — and I can't do it from one to twelve, can't do it yet. I can't rattle 'em off from one to twelve, in succession. That don't mean nothing to me! It's to get the job done, that's what I come to this program for, to stop from drinking.

It is the pragmatic test that has caused A.A. to reject the opinion of those religious groups which argue that no one can obtain effective help from God unless they believe in one particular concept of God, or one particular doctrine of how God's help is obtained. One religious group says that you have to have had a conversion experience at a revival, another group says that you have to believe that Jesus Christ, by his death on the cross, made a full and sufficient substitutionary atonement for all our sins, another group says that you have to believe that the bread and wine on the altar becomes the actual body and blood of Christ, another group insists that you must realize that the blue skinned Krishna is the principal avatar of the god Vishnu, another group says that you will be damned to hell if you eat a slice of bacon or a pork chop, another group says that you will be cursed if you do not acknowledge that Mohammed was God's prophet, while another group will tell you that cows are sacred and must be allowed to roam the city's streets freely and never injured or hindered in any way.

Pragmatically, A.A. has found that none of these kinds of things have to be believed or practiced — at least for all people at all times and all places — in order for the living God to reach down and not only relieve the compulsion to drink, but guide the person into a new dimension of reality, living in what is almost heaven on earth, with God as constant helper and companion.

Many people come into A.A. and hold back from seriously practicing prayer and meditation because they say they simply cannot “figure out what God is,” or “understand what you mean by God.” They may describe themselves as atheists or agnostics, or simply as people who are totally confused and cannot “make sense out of” any kind of belief in a higher power.

But at the actual *pragmatic level*, it has been demonstrated in A.A. over and over again that, in order to start successfully down the path laid out by the twelve steps, there is no necessity for having some single overpowering emotional religious experience of any sort, and there is in fact *not even any necessity of having any sort of concept or understanding of who or what God might be*.

Goshen Bill makes this point in a simple story of two men, both alcoholics, who came into the program together. One man was a total atheist, but the other man at least believed that there was a God of some sort — to enough of an extent that he was willing to get down on his knees and surrender and pray for help. And this second man was able to stay sober every day that he made this surrender and prayed this simple prayer. But what about the first man? Was he then without hope and without help?

That’s like the guy that comes to the program [who was an atheist]. He said “*he didn’t believe* in God.” The other guy he was working with says, “Well . . . .”

[The atheist] say: "Praying? . . . uhn, what'll I say?"

[The other man] said, "Whatever you want to."

So he got down on his knees, he said, "Whoever it is that's helping this man," say, "help me."

And he got help! Why? He had surrendered. He give it up. And when he was saying, "whoever helping that man, help me," God was helping that man, see? And it worked. He was ready.

Versions of this story have been repeated in real life, with the same kind of instant success, over and over again in the history of A.A. along the Chicago axis and over into the St. Joseph river valley to its east. Countless men and women, who either totally rejected the concept of a God, or who could figure out no way of making sense out of the idea, turned simply to the idea of "whatever it was that seemed to be present in the spirit around the tables at A.A. meetings," and turned their lives and wills over to the care of that "spirit of the tables."

The standard A.A. advice to newcomers who ask about what-I-am-encountering in moments of quiet prayer, is simple: do not try to reason about it and analyze it to death, just *feel* it, listen to it in your heart, let it start to guide you, and then *surrender yourself* to the love, goodness, and compassion which you can somehow feel coming into your heart while you are praying.

The hardest part of this, Goshen Bill knew, was that to learn to feel this spirit of the table, this contact-with-something-or-someone which can be felt in prayer, you have *listen*. It is plain common sense that you must *listen to learn*. But first, for most alcoholics, you must develop a skill that alcoholics usually do not know anything about: we must *learn to listen*.

A lot of 'em get sidetracked. They get on [Interstate Highway] 80 and 90 out here, toll road, you goin' to Chicago. All right, if you get off at the wrong corner, you ain't gonna make it. You might make it, but look how many extra miles you'll drive, how much extra gas it'll cost you to go out there and get lost, and then come back and find the toll road to go to here.

If you'd listened the first time, you'd a been there. We have to learn to listen. That's the first thing an alcoholic got to do, is *to learn to listen*. Then you LISTEN to LEARN.

Because I never saw an alcoholic yet that would listen to you. He will out-talk you, or change the subject, or "Yes, but . . ." When they start doing that, stop talking! Because he is not accepting *anything* you say. So just [say], "Well, I'll see you later," and get up and leave.

At the concrete, pragmatic level, *surrendering your own will* means, for example, that if the people around the A.A. table who have demonstrated the ability to stay sober tell you (as they will!) that you have to stop dropping by the old bar or saloon where you used to hang out, then you not only have to start *listening* to the warning they are giving you, *you also have to stop going in that bar*.

And all of you people, every one of you: if you want this program, if you got to surrender your own will, DO IT. If you don't, it ain't gon' last, I tell you that. I seen it tried too many times. Say, "Well, I stop by, see what the boys doing." Uh huh. You gonna drink Coke, uh huh? Pretty soon, before you know it, you got a double [whiskey].

A.A. is a pragmatic program, an action program, and surrendering your will is not some airy state of mind, but the systematic,

unfailing, long-term carrying-out-in-actions-and-deeds — for twenty-fours of every day of your new life — of a new principle of behavior. If the people around the A.A. table who are staying sober tell you (as they will!) “Don’t drink, go to meetings, do the next right thing,” then it is a simple question of whether you are going to insist on doing your own will, or whether you are going to start following directions and going to meetings like they told you to.

Meetings! They get so [they think they’re suffering such hardship]! “I can’t make meetings, too far for me to walk.” Well now we got meetings almost anywhere you look! If you don’t go to a meeting, it’s your own fault! You don’t *want to go*. Nobody had to pick you up and take you to a meeting. They didn’t pick you up and take you to a tavern, did they? Did it ever rain so hard you couldn’t go get a drink? *[Laughter]* Hell no! It never got too cold, snow never got too deep. But still, you get so [you’re saying in this little whiny voice], “Oh, weather too bad, I can’t get out there.”

You haven’t surrendered either. Uh uh. You go just as far to stay sober as you did to stay drunk. And that was twenty-four hours work. You had no off time when you was drinking. If you wasn’t drinking, you was thinking about it. If you wasn’t thinking about, you was trying to hustle enough to get it. You wasn’t satisfied to go to sleep and not have a drink to wake up on.

A.A. people never talk about “figuring out the program” or “understanding the program,” they talk about *working the program*. Alcoholics are given a day’s reprieve from their fatal disease, one day at a time, for as long as they *de facto work the program*. That — and the hand of God’s grace, and the love of

other recovering alcoholics who reach out to steady them if they begin to stumble — is all that stands between them and the abyss of destruction. But being held up by the hand of God's grace is not a bad place to be at all. In fact, it is the safest and most powerful place in the world to be.

Paradoxically, there is no human being who has a greater sense of personal security than one of those marvelous old timers like Goshen Bill, and yet someone like a Goshen Bill will always be equally aware that he, like the rawest newcomer to the program, is never given more than this day's reprieve from his disease, contingent upon whether he continues to work the program actively:

But with God's help and the help of you people, I can stay sober one day at a time.

When I get to feeling too good, look out! You won't work your program as good as you would if you was feeling bad. Yeah. Ummn yes, you feeling too good, everything coming your way, you cut down on working your program. Zpppp! And they say, "What happened?" Huh! You know what happened. You was freeloading. Uh huh.

You had to work the program to get up on that high, now you don't work it and you got to come down.

If you work the program, then you *get sober*, and you *stay sober* — for as long as you continue working the program. Paradoxically, it is both a program of human action and a program totally based on divine grace. But the actions I am asked to carry out are so simple, really — go to meetings and quit making excuses, quit hanging around the bars where I used to drink, pray for help to *something* (some of the old-timers would say jokingly to newcomers, "we don't care if you pray to the tree in your front

yard”) — and none of them things for which I deserve any acclaim as a great moral hero, so that the real credit has to be given to God, and to the other people around the table, who loved me even when I could not love myself.

This is what surrender means, and real humility. Goshen Bill knew that as long as he remembered to do that, he could live in the sunlight of the spirit and enjoy the inner peace of true serenity, all the days of his life, and would never have to fear anything in the universe, either in this world or the next.



## CHAPTER 17

### Goshen Bill: Working the Twelve Steps

In his lead,<sup>68</sup> Goshen Bill talks at great length about the twelve steps and explains how they not only describe the principal problems which afflict alcoholics, but also tell us how to begin dealing with these problems in a new kind of way — one that will enable us to function in the real world without having to drink all the time. It would profit any newcomer to the program to listen to what Goshen Bill says, because nobody ever explained things more clearly and vividly than him.

He also talks about men and women who attend A.A. meetings and stay away from booze for a while, but then go out and get drunk again. Some people call these “slips,” but Goshen Bill rejects that word contemptuously. It was secret *reservations* about the program, he says, or *premeditated behavior* of the sort that everyone in the program knows will take an alcoholic back to drinking, or *refusal to work the steps* in wholehearted and genuine fashion (especially lying to ourselves about whether we are really living according to the first three steps).

It is not a “slip” when someone sees the edge of a cliff right ahead of him, hears everyone calling out to him that there is a sheer drop hundreds of feet down, and then steps off the edge anyway.

## Steps 1, 2, and 3

The first key word in Step One of course is the word powerless. Goshen Bill talked graphically about the character of his own personal powerlessness over alcohol:

I could be setting here, and if I take one drink, I couldn't guarantee anything. Because that's all it took to touch it off. It's just like having a keg of dynamite and a long fuse — say that long [*indicating with his hands*]. Oh, you can stand there, and laugh, play, do anything, but when it get very short, you better start moving. You know why? It's gonna blow. You can't say, I'm gonna stand here and God's gonna take care of me. You better move your heinie! Because that's the way it's made to do.

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You know, they used to tell me, said “Bill, you're a hell of a swell guy, if you didn't drink so much.” Hah! See what I mean? “And just quit drinking, and see how happy you'll be.” Huhn? It's the under-things that go with the picture. You're in the habit, when you wake up in the morning, you want a cigarette and you want a drink. You'll take the drink, and then you'll light the cigarette. All right, you wake up, you want that drink, and it isn't there. Now you got to hurry up and get out on the streets and go find that drink.

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Whiskey come first. Grocery bill? Huh! We don't have to pay that, but we got to have something to drink. Um hmm. Go to the market, my wife she gets one of those go-carts, you know, she reached up and get something — she pulled it, she didn't push it — she throw it back in the cart. You know where I was? I was behind her, I'd take it out

and put it back up. *[Laughter]* When she get to the checkout, she had three dollars and thirty cents worth of groceries!

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I used to call people “fool.” I’d be setting out there spending money left and right, he’d come in and get him a double shot and drink it and go home, and hell, if I’d have wanted no more than that, I wouldn’t have stopped [in the tavern at all]. Hmm? I thought *he* was crazy; but *I* was the one who was crazy. Because I had no control over alcohol, and I don’t have now.

It did not matter what kind of moral standards or sense of personal worth and dignity the person had before the drinking got really bad. The alcoholic compulsion ultimately had the power to turn anyone into a liar, a thief, a beggar — whatever it took to obtain that drink.

If you wanted a drink, you went and got it. If you didn’t have nowhere to get it, you’d commit a crime to get it. Steal out of the little bank you got there at home. I used to get up in the middle [of the bed] — all the kids had a bank you know, to put their money in — and I’d get up in the middle of the bed and put a blanket over it and hit it with a hammer, and man, I’d have all kind of change. Stealing from my own kids to go buy a drink. That wasn’t quite right, was it? I don’t have to do that now. Uh uh.

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Wake up in the morning, hardest job in the world is to get that first drink. But after you got that first one, you could beg the judge out of a drink! Go down to police headquarters, and when they’re changing shifts, the ones that’s going on, don’t bother them. The ones that’s coming out, ask ’em, they’ll give you a quarter. Uh huh. You don’t

have to ask but about five of 'em before you got you a drink. And then from there, you can go. But without a drink, you was just as helpless and useless as anything.

The second key word in the First Step is unmanageability. The alcoholics' lives progressively become more and more out of control, and no matter what they do, things just keep on getting worse. They become pitiful creatures, and eventually everyone around them starts to regard them as laughingstocks. At first, the alcoholics may even think that this "helps make them popular."

I didn't think I could go out and have fun and not get drunk and show my hind end. That was all I knew. Be the biggest clown! Be the biggest fool! Make people laugh. I thought that was great. Come to find out, I was just a *showman*. If they give me a drink, I'd stand on my head and do anything. Uh uh, I don't have to do that now, uh uh.

Then their powerlessness really begins to come out even more vividly, when the alcoholics start making *promises to quit*. They are sometimes totally sincere when they make the promise to stop drinking and go on the wagon — at the conscious level, they mean it, and intend it, and expect to carry out that promise. But when the insane compulsion next strikes, they head for the bottle as though they had never made that promise.

And I went down the tube. I'd get sick, and I'd swear, I'll never drink the damn stuff again. And I felt that way, I meant that. But I wasn't the boss. Liquor was. "One more won't hurt." Take one . . . and a hundred and one. If you want to, if you can *stand up* that long! I was a victim to liquor.

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Get me out of jail. In Toledo, Ohio, I was in the Safety Building on the fourth floor, on Easter morning. And you're talking about some beautiful people — those people going to church, you know? — on Easter morning, and the kids dressed in their clean clothes, and oh, they was looking so good, and I told God, I said, "You get me out of here, I'll go to church." It wasn't five minutes before a man came up and went my bond. You know where I went? I went down on Illinois Street and got drunk again!

So the A.A. program accepts the pragmatic terms of the problem itself: (1) admit that the compulsion which is disrupting your life *unmanageably* is too *powerful* to oppose by your own willpower or thinking ability, and (2) acknowledge that it is a nonrational urge which throws your thinking processes into a temporary *insanity* at the time it strikes.

The only thing that can combat this is a nonrational, feeling-based, action therapy founded on a power greater than that of any human or earthly force. And that means (3) that alcoholics have to surrender their lives and wills to this beneficent and totally trustworthy power.

Step number one: we admitted, see, that we was powerless over alcohol, and we also admitted that our lives had become unmanageable. Right? All right.

What does the second step say? We came to believe . . . that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. They all in past tense, the first three [steps].

And the next one, you made a *decision* — you didn't say "I *think* I'll do it" — you made a *decision* to turn your will

and your life over to the care of God as you understood him. If you was lying, you ain't got no program.

There's nothing tangible that anyone can give you that you won't want another drink. That's up to you and God. You can lie to me. You can tell me, "*I haven't had a drink in so many years,*" and drunk yesterday! It ain't gon' hurt me. You — either one of you, or all of you — go out and get drunk tonight, I don't have to wake up with a hangover! So what's the use lying to me? I can't give you sobriety! I can just tell you how I got mine.

Goshen Bill put it bluntly — and the joint experience of A.A.'s all along the Chicago axis and all over the St. Joseph river valley region to its east, has proved him right over and over again — that alcoholics who do not eventually find *some* God of their own understanding, will ultimately drink again. The compulsion to drink is a form of insanity that cannot be countered by the products of insight therapies and behavioral therapies, when the compulsion hits the mind full force.

When the pressures that revive the old compulsion to drink become strong enough, the only thing that can save the recovering alcoholic is an instinctual throwing of himself into the saving arms of God — and in the blind panic of that moment of terror, he will not make that saving leap into God's arms unless he has discovered through experience, over and over again, that there is a safe haven there of compassion and love and defense against all foes, which is absolutely dependable and trustworthy.

And at one time in every alcoholic's life, he do NOT have the power NOT to take a drink. That's when he need God. If he ain't got God, he gonna take a drink. Yeah!

The temporary insanity that overpowers alcoholics' minds when they reach for the first drink is different from those mental illnesses which the psychiatric profession labels as "psychoses," even if the difference between some alcoholics and some psychotics is not always easy to define or even diagnose. Even nowadays, alcoholics sometimes find themselves consigned by misdiagnosis to mental health facilities for the dangerously or bizarrely insane, even if their real underlying problem is the drinking and its effects on their behavior. It happened to Goshen Bill, who mused on his own experiences when he was put in an insane asylum at one point:

He said that he "could restore us to sanity." But if you wasn't sane *to start with*, then he ain't got nowhere to restore you to. Hmm? If you're nuts all the way up, you ain't got nowhere to go. It's say, like people in the nuthouse, they mix the alkies and the nuts together. And they'd say, "Oh, you're an old alcoholic," they say, "you are nuts." [*Laughter*] Well, what's the difference? We're both locked up. You see? And I wouldn't want to be an alcoholic, I wouldn't want to be a nut. So we helped each other. They do that to learn you how to accept people. They put you among the crazy people.

One fellow who was there — and he was a whole lot crazier than I was — and he'd set around, and read, he'd look up at the clock. It's nine o'clock, and he'd say, "Enough of that man, [I'm] going to bed!" He'd get up and walk over to a clock, he'd pray, come back by his chair and he'd bow, [he'd say] "Good night" to his chair, and go to bed. See? Now he was nuts. I knew I was in better shape than he was. But he thought he was in better shape than I was, because I'm an alcoholic, going to be one all my life. Now he have a chance to be restored to sanity, but I ain't

got a chance of quit being an alcoholic. See? So he thought he had the best of me, and I thought I had the best of him, so we done pretty good. Each to his own!

The A.A. program will often work even on alcoholics who are severely mentally troubled, as long as they are not so deeply psychotic that they are totally out of touch with reality. Matters become more problematical when they are doing things like holding conversations with armchairs, and wearing hats made out of aluminum foil to prevent the aliens from outer space from reading their thoughts. (They believe that there are creatures who came here from another planet on a flying saucer, and are living in the house next door and pretending to be human beings — “but I’m not fooled,” the psychotic says in his paranoid delusion, “I know better” — and puts on his aluminum foil hat.) Past a certain point, psychotic delusions like these can render people so deeply out of contact with reality that the concepts of self-honesty and truth no longer have any real-world referents.

Nevertheless, there are recovering alcoholics in the St. Joseph river valley who have to battle against voices in their heads telling them to do things like bite off their own fingers or stab themselves with butcher knives, who have to have a lot of psychiatric help and use some kind of medication, but who can stay sober by attending A.A. meetings and working the steps. There are also alcoholics who are extremely mentally retarded (functioning at perhaps a six-year-old or ten-year-old level) who belong to A.A. groups in our area, and are able to stay sober and to gain profound serenity and an incredibly impressive kind of practical spiritual wisdom. The real issue is, is there some residual capacity of meaningful self-honesty, some ability to see that the problem lies in me and my thinking processes and not in the real outside world? But there has



to be that kind of honesty. If we are either incapable or unwilling to be honest with ourselves, then the twelve steps will not work.

The Third Step: we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as *we* understand him. So, there's three times you got a chance to be honest. And if you ain't honest there, you ain't got no further to go. You ain't got no program. You ain't got nothing to work.

Part of the problem that can arise at this point, is that alcoholics typically want instant gratification and instant, total solutions to all their problems. We have just started the program, we have just made a Third Step, and we want the fruits of ten years sobriety right on the spot! That is what we *want*, Goshen Bill says,

But, you know, there's three answers to every prayer: Yes, No, and Wait. And we don't want to wait. You take an alcoholic, he ain't got time to wait, he's chomping at the bits, he's got to go, he ain't got no time to waste. That's when you mess up. I tell you what you do when you get like that: You turn your will and your life over to the care of God. You took it back when you're going doing other things.

He ain't going to *beg* you to let him take care of you. He can do without you. He said [Matthew 3:9], before he'd let the devil have more souls than he did, he would command *stones* to be made into souls! I don't want no rocks taking my place, I want to live right. He can do without you. He don't have to have you. There was a time he didn't have a human being. He decided to make [some right there]. See? . . .

Now [Jesus] told Peter, said, "Before the cock crows three times, you will deny me." "Oh no, Lord!!! Not ME." Heh, heh. And Christ is up there on the stand, they ask

Peter, said, “Weren’t you with him? He say, “Hell no, I don’t know nothing about him.” See? That’s how quick he got back in self.

Christ was walking on the water. Peter say, “*If* that’s you” — and who else do he think could walk on water but him? [*Laughter*] See? He was in doubt — he say, “*If* that’s you, tell me to come to you.” He say, “Well come on, this is me.” So Peter made a couple of steps, and then he got thinking, “Look, old Peter walking on water!” BOOM! Down he went. [*Laughter*] It don’t take but just half a minute for you to get back into self.

The alcoholic’s spiritual problem arises because he is totally self-centered. The total surrender to God which occurs in an honest Third Step is a re-centering of one’s life into a new mode of existence which is God-centered instead. The constant temptation however, even for the greatest saint, is *to get back into self* again.

So the actual texture of a successfully recovering alcoholic’s life is NEVER a *perfect* practicing of the Third Step all day long, every day of the week. That is why *the successful recovering alcoholic must perpetually live on grace* all his life long, relying, not on his own perfection, but on God’s marvelous tolerance and forbearance and forgiveness.

At some point in their working of the program, alcoholics begin to realize that God’s grace was in fact always there, even back when they were drinking and doing totally crazy things. Why didn’t I injure myself badly doing X? Why didn’t I get killed when I did Y? God must have been loving me and taking care of me even when I was totally rejecting him! Like all recovering alcoholics, Goshen Bill remembered with real horror some of the things he actually did while he was drinking:

Yeah! I didn't care what happened after I got my drink. But God took care of us. He always takes care of drunks and fools. And I was in both categories, I was a drunk, and a fool. But I don't have to do that now, you know? Why? I got too much help for me to do that. I don't have to.

This is the freedom which the program brings. *I don't have to be a drunk and a fool now.* And this too is part of what we mean by God's grace: his free gift to us of a new freedom and a new happiness, which we certainly (by *our* behavior) never even remotely deserved. We do not have to be drunks any longer — never again! We also are not *compelled* to be fools any longer — although this part we never do even remotely perfectly, for which God's marvelous grace must be the object of our unflinching gratitude!

### Steps 4, 5, 6, and 7

Most of the things the newcomer has to start working on in Steps Four to Seven are not “deep psychological issues” in the psychotherapist's sense. A lot of alcoholics are like small babies even in the ordinary little things of everyday life, who have to learn simple things like how to handle money and personal finances, and how to handle the everyday stresses of an ordinary job where the boss may sometimes seem overly brusque or insensitive, or may insist that you do a particular job his way even when you are convinced that this is totally the wrong way to do it.

We got people come to A.A. just to get a job, see. And how long will they stay sober? Until he make a pay. First thing he's got to do is learn how to handle money, because

he drink it up and throw it away, everything he made. And he owe everybody that'll let him have anything.

And he call that fun? You wake up in the morning and you stagger to the bathroom and you got three jobs a-going at the same time, and none of 'em was washing your face. You was busy: you're trying to puke, and you just feel like you're gonna die, and wish you could die, and you get a little sicker, and then you're scared you're gonna die. You're just all messed up.

We have to learn a totally new way of life in working on these steps, a manner of living which involves more than getting drunk and throwing up. If we need to learn elementary responsibility, then this is where we start.

But all alcoholics come into A.A. with a mindset in which their drinking has fundamentally taken precedence over money, and over holding a job or otherwise carrying out their daily responsibilities. If they are "high bottom drunks" who come into A.A. still holding a steady job that they have been at for some years, and are not irreparably in debt, then financial disaster is one of the Not Yets (as they are called in A.A.). If they are *Not Yet* penniless bums and bag ladies living on skid row, *all they have to do is keep on drinking*, and like all the other Not Yets in the progression of the disease, this one will come to pass too.

## Steps 8 and 9

It is wise not to rush into the amends phase of the program too quickly, and it is even wiser to check out any specific amends you are thinking about with a sponsor, or with someone else in the program who has a good deal of sobriety, before attempting them. Goshen Bill gives one of his own experiences as a kind of hilarious

warning about the trouble a person can get into by jumping in too quickly and too foolishly.

And then, I started looking at the Steps. And boy, every one of them hit me right in the face. One mistake I made, on that “making amends” — I screwed that one up real good! So, there was a fellow there in Fort Wayne, I took his wife from this brother. She kicked him out, and the law give her the kids and the house, and he had to pay child support, [with me living with her now instead of him]. So, you know what happened? He come down — he wouldn’t give her the money, he’d leave it up town with the judge, so the judge would do it — he had some extra money, he come down, he wanted to get the kids, take ’em up town, buy something for ’em, you know, like a daddy would want to do. You know what I done? “Hey, you got to ask me, I’m the head of this house.” *[Laughter]*

So, when I got sober, they got talking about this “make amends.” I didn’t read it good enough! So when I got back to Fort Wayne, I called him. Wanted to set up a date with him, you know, so we could talk this thing over. I said, “This is Bill.”

He said, “Who? *that* Bill callin’?”

I say, “Yeah.”

He said, “Want to tell you something,” he said, “got me another wife, and I got me a family. *Gonna* have a family,” he says, “she’s expecting.” He said, “I moved just outside of the city limits,” he said, “and if you come out there, I’m gonna blow your damned brains out!”

Ho, ho! I went back and read it, it said “*be willing* to make amends,” it didn’t say you had to *do it*. I almost got shot before I read it right. *[Laughter]*

Oh man, I’m gonna work the program jam up! But it said, “be willing.” So, I was willing, but I ain’t gonna hunt

the son of a bitch up! If I happen to meet him on the streets, I'll make amends, see? But, uh uh — don't *look* for him, he might be still mad. Who knows? You can get wiped out doing that!

So, you just live your program, and when *this person get right*, your higher power will put you two together when *things get right*.

In the Big Book, it gives a list of Twelve Promises at the end of the description of Step Nine, with the assurance that these promises will start coming true “before we are half way through” carrying out all the amends we need to make.<sup>69</sup> They represent twelve areas, in other words, in which our lives will be healed and made whole again, once we start to do things to *mend* some of the damage we caused by our old way of life. We need to do this right, because when we begin to *mend* something, that means our job is to repair, restore, fix, overhaul, reconstruct, rectify, make restitution, renovate, and rejuvenate. We are not doing this job right, if what we are doing creates even more chaos, turmoil, hurt, pain, and damage to people's lives.

We also need God's grace in order to do it successfully. If I make an effort to mend things, and ask for God's help while I am doing it, God will pitch in, and make the mending job come out ten times better than anything I could ever have done by myself. The Twelve Promises represent far more than the mechanical rewards of my own efforts at self-improvement and “fixing things.” They will always contain extraordinary gifts of God's grace, where the mending job is going to produce things so marvelous I could never have imagined them.

It is also important to realize that we are not doing these things in an attempt somehow or other to “earn” God's love. We need to

keep remembering that these are promises of grace. The word “grace” means gift — someone giving us a present because he or she loves us. This is totally different from something we “earn” or “deserve.” We have to make amends though, because we have to clear away the wreckage of the past before we can start making use of some of the new gifts God wants to give us.

Men and women who have worked the steps long enough start to be very grateful indeed that God never gave them what they *deserved*. Instead he fills our cups to overflowing with countless gifts that we never in any way earned or deserved. This is the source of part of the enormous happiness and joy which comes from working the steps. It is one of the reasons for the incredible passion with which alcoholics in particular work the steps — they remember how really bad it used to be, and the minute they start to get even a little taste of how good it can be walking in this new light of the spirit, all they want is more and more of the serenity and blessings that come from God’s grace and living in his presence.

I mean, I followed it all the way down to the bottom. It’s nothing there for me to go back after. I got more than I wanted, on my way down. And every day, I got to think about that.

I’m an alcoholic. I’ve *got* to work this program, or lose what I got. And I know what’s over on that side of the fence, I been there.

I’m seeking something on this side, and every day it get a little better. You hear a fellow said, “Gee, this day was *beautiful*! I don’t know if it get any better, or I don’t know whether I could stand it or not!” Just keep working the program, you can stand it. And after it starts getting good, you want to make it more. You work that much harder.

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With God's help and the help of you people, I can stay sober one day at a time. When I get to feeling too good, look out! You won't work your program as good as you would if you was feeling bad. Yeah.

Ummn yes, you feeling too good, everything coming your way, you cut down on working your program. Zpppp! And they say, "What happened?" Huh! You know what happened. You was free-loading. Uh huh. You had to work the program to get up on that high, now you don't work it and you got to come down.

But if you'll work it, you gonna have a lot of high and low spots, but the high ain't quite as high and the low ain't quite as low, you don't have too far to slide. When you feel *real good*, dig in and start working that program. And then you can come down easy, you don't come down so hard. You got to be ready, and expect anything to happen, long as you're trying to do right.

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Once you get a taste of it, it's just like a cat is: he lose his mother, and you want him to drink milk, and he won't drink it, put some milk on your finger, and let him touch that, and he'll follow it, and then you won't have no more trouble, he'll drink it. But you got to show him how. None of us, while we were drinking, knew how to stay sober. Didn't know how, didn't know nothing about it.

Alcoholics who have tasted the fruits of the Twelve Promises, and who have experienced the happiness and serenity that comes from living the life of the steps, will fight anything, and go to any lengths to preserve their sobriety.

I've had my seventeen years of pretty good times! And I don't want *nobody* to interfere with it. Huh! I come here to



quit drinking, I didn't come here to quit fighting. And if you want to see a battle, you let somebody try to make me take a drink. Then I'll show you what the old man can do! Because I don't want it, I don't need it, and it isn't necessary.

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Hmm? Friendship cease when you want me to take a drink, 'cause I'm not gonna take it. It ain't gonna hurt you, it'll hurt me. And I've hurt enough. I've got a taste of sobriety. I've got a taste of happiness. And one drink will spoil it all. What I want to spoil it just for one drink? I will *not*. Why? Because I'm living the life now I didn't think was possible!

It is only working *all the steps* that produces this happiness, Goshen Bill warned. We have to make the moral inventory, and the amends, and start the regular practice of prayer and meditation and self-monitoring, and so on . . .

. . . IF we want *happy sobriety*. You know, a dry drunk is worse than a wet one to me. When you're drunk, you got sense enough to know, one day you're gonna sober up or die. But if you're on a dry drunk, what have you got to look forward to?

Being on a "dry drunk" means that people have no alcohol in their systems, but are nevertheless still thinking and feeling like a practicing alcoholic inside their heads. Being on a dry drunk is a hellish existence, because people have all the fear and resentment, all the anger and rage and self-pity, all the anxiety and worry, all the oscillation between manic activity and dark depression and paralyzing despair of the practicing alcoholic — but do not have

the numbing effect of the alcohol to at least partially anesthetize these feelings.

Nevertheless, Goshen Bill pointed out, pain can be a great motivator. There was no point in wasting your time trying to convince newcomers to A.A. that they needed to start working through the steps conscientiously, if it was clear that they were still too prideful and arrogant to listen to you, and too impressed with what they believed to be their own superior intelligence and strength of character. If they were not lured by the assurance that working the steps would allow them to experience a greater *happiness* than they had ever known before, then the best thing to do was to abandon them until *pain* became a sufficient motivator.

Because I never saw an alcoholic yet that would listen to you. He will out-talk you, or change the subject, or “Yes, but . . .” When they start doing that, stop talking! Because he is not accepting *anything* you say. So just [say], “Well, I’ll see you later,” and get up and leave. And if he get hurting enough, he’ll call you, you don’t have to go see him. When he get to hurting, and he *know* how good he felt when he was there, he comin’ back. Lot of ’em say, he’s somewhat ashamed, huh. When the pain gets big enough he ain’t ashamed. Huh?

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But if he hurt enough, he’ll come looking for you. You hear him say, “too far for me to go to a meeting.” If he hurt enough, he’ll go. Uh huh. It take pain to send us here. You forget all about that damned pride when you get to hurting. See? You say, “Well, that’s a place I *know* I can get it [to stop hurting like this].”

And you *will*, when you hit bottom, ’cause there’s nowhere else to go but UP. They say it’s like being at the south pole, all directions is up. North pole, all directions is

down. So we was at the south pole. Can't go no farther, death is the next thing. So we started to move up.

## Step 12

“Carrying the message” for Goshen Bill meant, not only making twelfth step calls on alcoholics, where he visited them in their homes or places of business, and invited them to start coming to A.A. meetings, but also sticking with the newcomers during their early period in the program, and giving them every help and encouragement during this rough time in their lives, when they were being asked to totally reformulate their whole understanding of themselves and of life.

But there was no point in wasting your time on people unless they had some compelling inner reason within themselves to do what had to be done to get sober. Otherwise, they would never be self-starting, self-motivating, self-evaluating, or internally committed enough to make it.

I hauled a man to meetings, oh I bet you six months, and every time I'd go by, he'd go to a meeting. I got to thinking, hell, he ain't never asked me to take him to a meeting, so I got him home that night, I said, “Well, one thing I want to ask you.” He said, “What is that?” I said, “Do you just go to meetings because I come by and get you?” He said, “Yeah.” I said, “Well, we can fix that.” I said, “Now when you want to go to a meeting, you call me.” Ten years passed, and I haven't heard from him! He was just going along for the ride, he didn't want to hurt my feelings. It wouldn't hurt my feelings! I don't care if he go out there and break his neck! It wouldn't change my sobriety.

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I do what I can. I will help a person IF they show me they want help. And if I see that they're swinging, and not paying any attention, and don't want to get sober, I drop 'em. Ain't any use of wasting your time with 'em. It's somebody over here *that want to get sober*, go over there and *work with that person*. You don't have to work with [a person that don't want to get sober]. But if he hurt enough, he'll come looking for you. You hear him say, "too far for me to go to a meeting." If he hurt enough, he'll go. Uh huh.

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But, if a fellow stop coming to meetings, stop by to see him. Don't ask him about the meeting. Just say, "I hadn't seen you, just wanted to see how you were getting along." Visit with him a while and go ahead on, *then* he know you're concerned. Then if he wants to come back, he'll call you. If he don't, the hell with him. If he don't want to find you, he don't want to stay sober. Or [if not you, then he'll] find somebody.

The A.A. program is filled with love, but it is also a totally *honest* program. The A.A. people will tell you the plain, blunt, unvarnished truth. It is also the case, that if you do not want their program, they are not going to let their own hard won serenity and sense of personal satisfaction and well-being be disturbed by the fact that there are other people who deliberately choose, by their own free will and true inner intentions, to continue to be totally miserable in spite of the fact that help and healing is available.

So I've had you people setting up here and looking at me, and me setting here looking at you. I've held you long enough.

I can let you people go back to lying or stealing or whatever you want to do. Huh! I don't care what you do. But, if you want to stay sober, you stick with the A.A. people. They's always a winner in A.A. Stick with the winner. All of you.

I love each and every one of you. Lot of you do things I don't like, but I love YOU as a human being. With that I will say thank you.

This is real love: to tell someone else the truth, not lead them even deeper into fantasy. To allow them the freedom to make their own decisions about their own lives. To put your arms around them, and accept them and love them, no matter how dirty and ragged and smelly they are, no matter how foul-mouthed and obnoxious, no matter how clingy and whining — but also to be willing to let them go, if they decide they prefer the misery they know to the strange and unknown experience of a new happiness and a new peace which you are offering. *That is real love, and that is the way God loves all of us too — God perpetually offers himself to us, but for some inexplicable reason he respects us too much ever to force himself on us if we do not want him.*

### **No such thing as a slip!**

Why do some people come into the program, attend meetings for a while, and then go back to drinking again? Goshen Bill did not believe that it was correct to say, as some people did, that “So-and-so had a slip.” There was something the people were doing, or not doing, so that the eventual return to the bottle was already “built in” to the structure of their underlying thinking and behavior, and would necessarily ultimately come to pass.

Sometimes hidden reservations are present. When you are hurting bad, you can say “I give up,” because at that point you cannot take the pain any more, and you may think to yourself — at the surface level of consciousness — that you have made a genuine surrender. But somewhere down deep in your mind you still have retained an inner *reservation*: if you ever got a chance to get back up, to get your wind back, to get a better weapon or what appeared to be a better opportunity — you would be plunging back into the fray instantly.

We had a man with eighteen years, and boom! down he went! Why? That was what I wanted to find out. I went to visit that man, and I wanted him to tell me truthfully what happened. He say, for that entire eighteen years, he did not think that his disease progressed unless he drank. He thought he would pick up where he left off, but uh-uh, that disease is right there. One drink, and he’s out. When he got sober, he was paralyzed from here down, he never walked another step.

Reservations. That’s why you’ve got to surrender to make this program. You can tell me *any* kind of lie, but you can’t fool God: he’s the only one who can do it.

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And all of you people, every one of you: if you want this program, if you got to surrender your own will, DO IT. If you don’t, it ain’t gon’ last, I tell you that. I seen it tried too many times.

Say, “Well, I stop by, see what the boys doing.” Uh huh. You gonna drink Coke, uh huh? Pretty soon, before you know it, you got a double [whiskey].

You say, “I didn’t know what I was doing.”

Heh heh! why didn’t you? Now how could you get up from right where you were sitting now, and go down there,

and buy a bottle of whiskey, and take a drink, and not know what you're doing if you're sober to start with? Wouldn't you know where you was going and what you was going to do?

Premeditated! No such thing as a slip. The only way you can call it a slip: you *slipped off the program*, and that drink was the result. The drinking's not a slip, that's premeditated. *You know you gon' get drunk, you just don't know when.* So you just keep putting it off, till you can't, and then you go get drunk.

And they say, "Well, come back and pick up where I left off." If you do, you're gonna get drunk again. You know why? You didn't work the first three steps to start with. Huh! You lied on all three of 'em, and you can't make it — *you can't make it* — and lie. You can talk the talk, but you got to walk the walk. Actions speak louder than words, and this is a program of action.

There are also simple pragmatic rules of behavior for not only getting sober but staying sober. Newcomers to the A.A. program are told repeatedly, for example: stay away from old playmates and old playgrounds.

All right, we got people that have come on the program, then they got to go back to the tavern and see what their buddies doing. *They* don't have to go there! They know what those people doing. Sitting there acting a fool, spending their money they gonna need next week.

Now why you want to go back to them for? You just stay away, and see how many of those people leave the tavern, come see how you getting along. Huh! If they was friends, they would, wouldn't they?

You go in there, and you flash a roll, and you got more people around you than you can do anything with. You

start getting broke, you look there over here, they got them a new one. Another sucker in the house. Just playing you for a sucker, and they still do.

Alcoholics who are new to the program can end up going back to the old bar they used to drink at — stupid as it may seem to a sensible person — because they are desperately lonely and emotionally needy people. One of the basic fears, perhaps in all alcoholics, is *the fundamental existential anxiety of rejection and abandonment*.<sup>70</sup> Their drinking buddies were the only “friends” they had, and they cannot see any meaningful life for themselves without the “support” of these acquaintances. “I wouldn’t have anybody to *pay attention* to me at all,” they think to themselves, and “there would not be anybody who *liked me* anymore.”

Goshen Bill rounds on that way of thinking: I do not have to betray myself any longer to get attention. I do not have to prostitute myself by buying “friends.” Furthermore, most of my old drinking buddies were not *real friends* in any sense of the word — a few simple pragmatic tests will quickly demonstrate that I was just deluding myself, because of my desperate neediness for a sense of being loved and wanted by *somebody*. But in A.A., you will find real friends, because, Goshen Bill says, real friends care whether you live or die.

*I don't have to buy no drink for nobody to get his attention!* If he don't like me for what I am, to hell with 'im! I ain't gonna change just for him. No! That'd be people-pleasing. See?

When I quit drinking, didn't none of those guys leave the tavern, come up and see if I was sick, or whether I need anything or not — they didn't give a damn. Only thing they miss is the money I spent. That's all they miss!



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Now, [in A.A.] you can be feeling bad, and somebody'll call: "I hadn't seen you, wanted to know if there was anything I could do for you." "I got uneasy, hadn't seen you around the meetings."

There ain't *nobody* call me and say, "What happened, buddy? I haven't seen you around the tavern." They don't do that. Why? They wasn't friends to start with! They were NOT friends.

Goshen Bill puts it bluntly. Let us quit the fantasies and stop misusing words and speak the honest, simple truth. If anyone at all tempts or tries to persuade a recovering alcoholic to take a drink, and start back once again on the road that leads to the alcoholic's total destruction, that person is not a friend, that person is a deadly enemy:

Hmm? Friendship cease when you want me to take a drink, 'cause I'm not gonna take it. It ain't gonna hurt you, it'll hurt me. And I've hurt enough. I've got a taste of sobriety. I've got a taste of happiness. And one drink will spoil it all. What I want to spoil it just for one drink? I will *not*. Why? Because I'm living the life now I didn't think was possible!

You may have had a few old drinking buddies who were real, genuine friends. Goshen Bill does not deny that at all. But the proof that they were real friends, instead of your worst and sneakiest enemies, is that they respond to your newfound sobriety by doing everything they can to support it, and fight *for* you to keep anyone from tempting you back into your old drinking life again:

Today, a man in Goshen, got a liquor store — he, his wife and him, [in the old days,] we go out after he close up, we drink, drink, drink. He got that liquor store. [But now] I got sober, and he tell anybody working for him, if you want to hold a job, don't sell Bill anything. Say, "I'm not gonna sell him, and you better not; if you do . . ." — he'll lose his job.

Now he appreciated me stopping drinking, and he had . . . a full-sale liquor store! Now, it was that much difference in me — he didn't want to see me get drunk again. Wasn't that wonderful? And I see him now drunk, and he put his arm around me, talk about how much he love me and all. "Ahahn . . . oh yeah, I like you too." But not well enough to take a drink!

Today, Goshen Bill said, "I've got a taste of sobriety. I've got a taste of happiness." And like the motherless kitten who tastes the drop of milk on the end of a human fingertip, and follows it to the bowl where it can drink all it wants, the recovering alcoholic in A.A. thirsts for nothing but more and more of this incredible serenity and inner peace and happiness. And the poor little kitten finds this magically, perpetually filled bowl of the milk of love and kindness and *being wanted* around the A.A. tables, and in being in God's presence in quiet prayer and silent meditation. Every time the kitten drinks from the magical bowl of milk, it leaves totally satisfied, and yet every time it drinks from the bowl it tastes even more delicious and satisfying than the previous time, so the more the kitten returns to the milk the more it desires it.

Only this is not a nursery tale about a lost kitten and a fantasy bowl of magic milk — *it is about A.A. and the life of the spirit, and is TOTALLY REAL.*

## CHAPTER 18

### John Shaifer: Interview

John William Shaifer (June 19, 1923–November 13, 2000) got sober on September 15, 1960, so that he too, like Goshen Bill, came into A.A. towards the end of the movement's first generation. After John came into the program, he traveled all over the state doing A.A. service work, and came to know all the great old-timers. He did his fifth step with Father Ralph Pfau, one of the four most-published early A.A. authors, a famous figure who was based in Indianapolis in those days, at the Convent of the Good Shepherd.

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The place John Shaifer got sober was Gary, which lay twenty-five miles east of downtown Chicago along the South Shore interurban railroad line. Located right on Lake Michigan, with a population of 178,320 in 1960 when John came into the program, Gary was 39% black. This percentage rose continually, until blacks had come to make up 84% of the population by the year 2000.

During John Shaifer's early days in A.A., Gary was totally dominated by the huge steel mills of the United States Steel Corporation. Those who drove through Gary on the toll road after dark were surrounded by flames shooting up into the night sky from the steel mills, in a scene that made their drive feel like a journey through hell. During the daytime, a huge plume of reddish orange smoke rose up far above the mills, and could be seen by airline pilots from many miles away. The pilots gratefully used it to help them

navigate into Chicago's two major airports. But those who lived there had to breathe the rust-red smoke and foul smelling fumes twenty-four hours a day.

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Beth M. from Lafayette, Indiana, at that time the chair of the Northern Indiana Area 22 A.A. Archives Committee, interviewed John Shaifer on tape on August 26, 1999, shortly before he gave his lead there in Lafayette. At the time of this interview, John (now 76 years old) was only twenty days short of his thirty-ninth anniversary date.

We were lucky to get this interview when we did — it was only a little over a year later, that John had a heart attack and died. Raymond Irving, Frank Nyikos, and Glenn C. went to the memorial service at his home in Gary, sad that John was no longer with us, but glad to be able to do honor to his memory.

## **WHAT JOHN SHAFER TOLD BETH M. IN THIS INTERVIEW**

Now, we would visit Michigan City prison [located on the South Shore interurban railroad line 25 miles east of Gary] on Saturday, and the group that I'm from was Midtown of Gary, and it was founded in the year of 1946.

And my sponsor George Smith took me about, over to Chicago, to the Evans Avenue Group, which is one of the oldest black groups in the city of Chicago. 'Cause as you know, Bill [Williams the tailor] has about fifty-four years sobriety, and I think that group is about fifty-five years old. And we used to travel quite a bit.

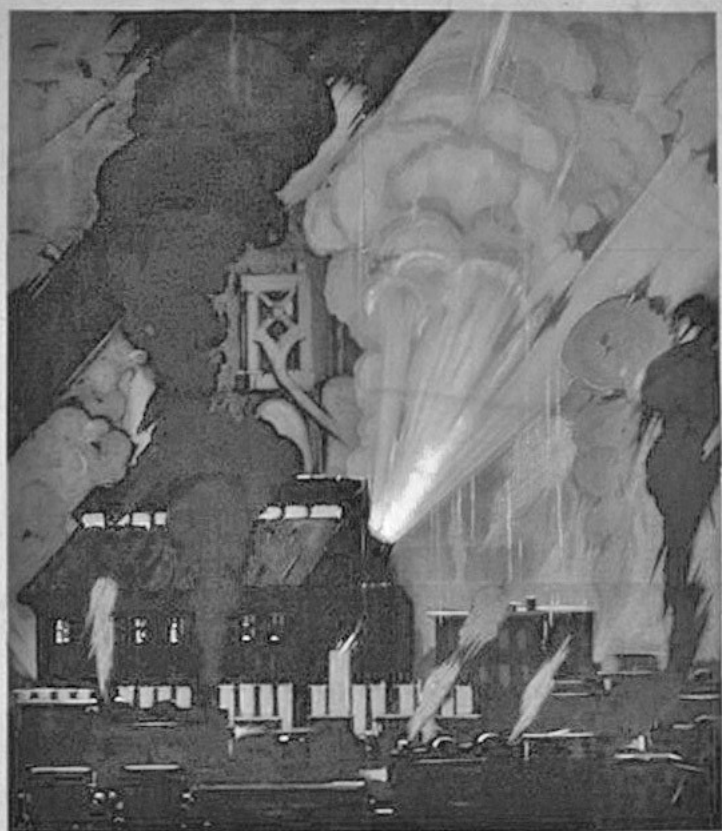
Me being a black man, and working with the institutions, I met a lot of men from different places, A.A.'s from Terre Haute and ... they were instrumental in me visiting different institutions, such as Pendleton. See, our group, we sponsored four black guys out of Pendleton. And one of the guys is still living, been sober about thirty years, or thirty-two years.

And we twelve-stepped the black all through the state of Indiana. Uh, some Saturdays we would go to Greencastle, that was on the farm. They had open house there. Then they had the open house at Pendleton. And usually it'd be three or four hundred people would go in to the open house. By me being institutional representative, I had to do a lot of travelling. I was away from home every Saturday. One Saturday in Michigan City, the next Saturday in Pendleton, the next Saturday in Terre Haute, the next Saturday at Michigan City state prison, and then Westville.

It was good work as far as I was concerned — it's keeping me sober. Because I stayed pretty busy for ten years. In other words, I two-stepped for ten years: I worked step one and made a lot of twelve step calls.

At Indiana Reformatory, they formed the Big Brother-Big Sister movement. Whenever a guy was discharged from the prison — say for instance if he was discharged to Crawfordsville — well, someone from Crawfordsville would meet him the day that he was supposed to be discharged, and drive him home. That's what we called the Big Brother-Big Sister movement.

And at that time, the four general assembly meetings was at Butler Field House in Indianapolis. See now, in Area 22, those meetings are scattered about in the northern half of Indiana, north of Indianapolis. And Area 23 takes care of the bottom half of Indiana.



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And like I said, on Thursdays we'd visit Beatty Memorial Hospital, work with the inmates there; Saturdays, Women's Prison in Indianapolis, work with the women. Our group sponsored four women out of Indiana Women's Prison, but we never had any success with the women. But we did have success with the men as far as working and doing institutional work.

Some of the guys that was instrumental in my life then was a gentleman by the name of Leonard Eton out of Lowell, he was a white fellow, very instrumental in my program. Then there was another one, Max Peterson, the Scottishman, and he was instrumental in my program. These guys showed me the ropes back in those days, as well as George Smith, another fellow that did institutional work. And another guy by the name of Kenny Aught, out of Michigan City. See, we'd have guys from all over — large cities in the state — take a month chairing a meeting in the institution. See, I met Wilkie, one of Glenn Coffey's friends. I met Glenn Coffey — he did time in Jackson State Prison up in Michigan.

And I'm grateful to the program for coming along at the time I came along. Because it really helped me. Because I was the type of person that I couldn't just go to meetings. Be just like when we leave here tonight: we might not get home till about ten, ten-thirty, eleven. And I've known times — going to Fort Wayne, Twelve Step House up there, Elkhart, South Bend, Goshen — see I met Goshen Bill in Goshen, the only black guy in the city of Goshen, Indiana, back in the 60's.

And it was very instrumental in our group, because our group is the mother group of just about all the black A.A. groups in Gary, as well as all the N.A. groups in Gary. See our group was, like I said, was founded in September 1946. See, my first introduction to

the program was the year of 1951, but I just merely hung around for about eleven months, I never got sober until I came back the fifteenth of September 1960 . . . .

We fellowshipped, and we were very close — I guess that was due to the fact that there weren't too many groups back then. See, you only had maybe seven groups in Gary; two groups in Hammond, Indiana; one group in Crown Point; one group in Lansing, Illinois [just west of Hammond]; one group in Hebron; one group in Valparaiso. And we would go as far as twenty miles, or thirty miles, or fifty miles, to a meeting back in those days. And like I said, we were very close-knitted because of the fact that you didn't have too many groups.

See, I knew just about every *intelligent* A.A. that started groups in Goshen, in Terre Haute, Indianapolis. See, I met a lot of people, and I'm truly grateful that I met these people.

And me being a black guy, it was amazing how cordial and how beautiful they were towards me. See, Kokomo, Muncie — we used to travel all over Indiana. And the institutional work is needed very badly. You can't get too many people to go in behind locked doors, because they have a phobia about going into an institution and working with that inmate, or with that girl, see, in women's prisons. So I can say that it was very cordial for me.

See right now, after thirty-eight years, I'm still doing sponsor work, sponsorship. Larry is one of my pigeons, see we old guys, we call 'em pigeons. And when we made twelve step calls back in those days, we were dressed just like I am dressed tonight. When we went on a twelve step call, we dressed up. This was the only way that we could convince this person that we were alcoholics [who had changed our lives]. I've been working with Larry now about five years, and I'm pretty soon gonna turn this guy loose,



because he's working the program today, and he's doing a beautiful job.

But I enjoy twelve step work, and this is the thing that kept me sober. See, the Big Book tells us, in order for you to lose yourself, if you're having any problems, get involved with service work, and you'll find that that'll bring you out of yourself. And this is what it done for me, twelve-stepping black people all over the state of Indiana. See, I was pretty well known during them ten years, institutional representative, intergroup representative, chairman of the intergroup. And it did wonders for me. I don't think I'd be sober tonight if it hadn't been for institutional work. And I still enjoy working with new people, as far as twelve step work is concerned.



## CHAPTER 19

### John Shaifer: the Steel Mill Worker from Gary

A transcript of the lead given by John William Shaifer in Lafayette, Indiana, on August 26, 1999. After serving as a sergeant in the U.S. Army during the Second World War, John had spent the next thirty-nine years of his life working in the Gary steel mills, which were located twenty-five miles east of downtown Chicago along the South Shore interurban railroad line. John was seventy-six years old at the time he gave this lead. He had gotten sober on September 15, 1960, and was at this point thirty-eight (almost thirty-nine) years sober, with an incredible amount of A.A. experience all across the state under his belt. Beth M. (Lafayette, Indiana), at that time the chair of the Indiana A.A. Area 22 Archives Committee, made the introduction.

**BETH:** Good evening everybody, my name is Beth, and I'm a grateful alcoholic, and it's my pleasure and honor to introduce to you tonight our speaker. John from Gary, Indiana, has come down tonight to speak for us. I met him and his lovely wife at the state convention this year at French Lick, and I was very impressed with his love and appreciation and devotion to the fellowship. And I am very grateful to him and to Larry for coming down here tonight and allowing us to be able to do this, and passing that torch on, and

that's something I feel that we need more to be committed to that pledge, to be able to pass it on to the newcomer that's coming into the door, so that they in turn can pass it on to more people after we're not here anymore. So with that I'm going to give you John.

**JOHN:** Thank you, Beth. I'd like to thank you for the invitation. Because there was a time that I wasn't invited nowhere. The taverns, I was even kicked out. But I did meet Beth at the Indiana State Convention, and it was a beautiful convention. I came down to share with you tonight, [to share] my strength and hope with you. And I only have one story, and I like to tell it, and I'm gonna tell it. First I'd like to say to the new people, identify with me, don't compare.

**JOHN THEN SHOUTED OUT:**

My name is John William Shaifer. I AM an alcoholic.

*[A weak "Hi, John" from the audience.]*

Hi, I'm gon' say it again. **MY NAME IS JOHN WILLIAM SHAFER, I AM AN ALCOHOLIC.**

*[A loudly shouted "Hey, John!"]*

Now that's more like it! *[Laughter]*

I'm a depression baby. I was born 1923, June 19th. My dad was a bootlegger. He bootlegged moonshine and beer. And I was a little guy, and I was the waiter in my dad's house. They sold moonshine fifteen cent a half a pint. Nickle a shot. Beer was five cents a bottle, home brew, because he made it all. I used to crush grapes in another tin-side tub, wash my feet good and clean, and then crush the grapes so he could make his wine.



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I know about alcohol, I've taste alcohol at an early age — five, six, seven, on up to teenage. My dad, he didn't believe in doctors. And if I had a cold, he'd make a whiskey toddy. He had a old fruit jar, he'd sent me to the drugstore to get some rock candy, and crush that rock candy and put it in that fruit jar. Then he'd put a little camphor in there, and then when he made his toddy, he'd cut up onions and lemons, see, and then he'd add some of that AK&W, alcohol and water to that, and steam it. He'd put me in bed — we didn't have blankets, we had quilts — and I had probably three or four quilts on top of me. And he said, "Son, I want you to drink this cup toddy, drink it down, and then cover your head." Man, you talk about drunk! *[Laughter]* But I can guarantee one thing, when I woke up that next morning, I was feeling good, the cold was gone.

He also, in the spring of the year, he would give us home brew to clean me out, if he didn't have sassafras tea. So what I'm telling you is, I know the taste of alcohol, but I didn't know anything about Alcoholics Anonymous.

During that time I seen at least two alcoholics that visit my father's house frequently, 'cause I used to have to take 'em home, 'cause he said, "Son, you're gonna have to take Mr. Cosby home. You're gon' have to take Mr. Brown home, because they get lost." So I take 'em home after they got drunk.

I went all through high school, and never dranked or smoked. I served three year in the United States Army, and I never dranked or smoked. I didn't start drinking, or smoking, until I was twenty-three years old. Discharged from the United States Army with an honorable discharge January 13th, 1946.

I worked in the steel mills prior to going to service, so I went back to the steel mill — Gary United States Steel. I did thirty-nine

years and seven months in United States Steel, I retired November the 24th, 1985.

### **John started drinking after his discharge from the U.S. Army in 1946**

Like I said, I didn't start drinking until 1946. A young lady, I correspond with her the whole time I was in service. I did six years: three years in the regular army and three years in the reserves. I got out just before the Korean war. I was a sergeant. I got married September the 20th, 1946.

And working in the mill, and working with older guys, they told me, says, "You're not a man!" Say, "You don't drink or smoke." Say, "In order for you to run with us, boy, you got to drink." So I started drinking. I liked alcohol. I wasn't a beer drinker, I wasn't a mixed drinker, and I liked that *old* stuff: Old Crow, a hundred proof; Old Granddad, a hundred proof; Old Taylor, hundred proof; Old Foster, a hundred proof. And old women. *[Laughter]*

Now I'm gonna be telling you about some of my escapades, 'cause I must qualify. After about a year and a half, or two years, I noticed the Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde, and I didn't know what the hell was wrong with me. I begin to have blackouts, and I didn't know what was wrong.

My wife knew. Incidentally, that's a beautiful person. I asked her, I says, "Why did you put up with me all these years?" We've been married fifty-two years. She's seventy-one years old and I'm seventy-six years old. And she told me, "The first year was beautiful." See, I could hold that liquor. I take her out, drink all night, and take her home, change clothes, just enough time to grab the bus and go to work.

But like I said, after about a year and a half, or two years, I noticed the Dr. Jekyll–Mr. Hyde personality. Once I took that first one, one wasn't enough, and a thousand was too many. And it's bad to say: any time I drank, if I had one shot . . . whatever I had in my pocket [the money would always end up being drunk away].

Incidentally, I was a periodic drinker, payday drinker. Big meal payday at U.S. Steel in Gary works was on a Monday. And I was a payday drinker; I wasn't a everyday drinker. But if I stopped and had a shot, it's bad to say, I never got home with a dime. And during that time, I had six children, buying a home, and a lovely wife.

It is only through the goodness of one of my foremens, rest his soul — his name was Dale Owens, he passed away about five years ago — this guy always went to bat for me. See, I was never reprimanded for drinking on the job; mine was absenteeism. I would call in and report off.

And after being on the program about six years, getting sober, the superintendent called me in the office and gave me a Christmas present, around Christmastime. I had about thirty-four 26A's — those were reprimands for absenteeism — and he told me, "John, I want you to read 'em, and tear 'em up, and throw 'em in the wastebasket, and then you'll have a clean slate." And I read one of 'em. My mother died seven times. *[Laughter]* My father died three times. *[Laughter]* I had seventy-two teeth extractions. *[Laughter]* My wife had twenty-seven babies. *[Laughter]* She only had seven! *[Laughter]*

And that supervisor, I talked to him Saturday afternoon — when he retired, he moved up in Michigan. We're still close. Back in those days, he told me, said, "John, I'm gonna give you twenty-eight days to get yourself straightened out. There wasn't any detox,



see, I had to do it cold turkey. And I used to have to walk to the . . . before I went to work, I used to have to go the general foreman's office, the midnight foreman, and blow my breath in his face . . . before I went to work. If he smelled alcohol, well he'd send me home.

That's how bad my drinking was. My consumption, I guess, was about a fifth and half of [Old Crow whiskey, Old Granddad whiskey, Old Taylor whiskey, Old Foster whiskey] — *old* anything, *old* a hundred proof — and about a case of beer. Was I a zombie? Yeah, I was a zombie.

### **John's last drunk**

All I want to tell you about tonight is my last drunk. Like I said, I was first introduced to A.A. in the year of 1951, about January the 8th, right after the New Year. And my dry time — I wouldn't say sobriety — my dry time lasted till about the 13th of December that year, and I went back drinking.

Because I was full of denial: I was in my twenties, I didn't think I was an alcoholic, and I know I didn't look like an alcoholic. Some of the guys I saw in Gary, they looked like alcoholics. And I guess the thing that kept me from staying was the fact that they told me, says, "Man, you so young! I drank thirty years!"

And see, I started drinking '46 — and this was 1951 — five years. And I said to myself, "Hell, if he drank thirty years, and this other guy drank twenty-five years, maybe I got thirty or twenty-five more years of drinking." [*Laughter*] But that wasn't so.

Well, I'm just wanta tell you about my last drunk. I told you I was a payday drinker. This was on a Monday. The nice bars, they kicked me out. I had to go to the red light district in Gary — you

know what I mean when I say red light district? I had to go down on the border, with the prostitutes, the addicts, the pimps. And I was down in that neck of the woods for about a year. And this tavern that I visit frequently was the Wonder Bar. I went to school with the owner, his name was Seyward.

I got paid that Monday, Goldblatt store was about four blocks from the mill, so I walked and paid a bill. And I did something that I'd never done before, I called my wife at Goldblatt.

And she said, "Ummpf, you're sober."

And I said to myself, "How in the hell does she know that I haven't had a drink?" Because she could tell me, when I'd call her sometime when I'd had a drink. And I couldn't figure that out, I thought she had a private eye following me! *[Laughter]*

And I told her, I said I'd be home within a half an hour.

And she say, "O.K., your supper will be ready."

### **Blackout drinking and the heroin den**

In Seyward's tavern . . . see, Broadway is the main street in Gary, it divides the west side from the east side. All streets on the east side are named after states, all streets on the west side are named after presidents or famous men, so it's easy as far as directions are concerned. And his tavern was one block from Broadway on 12th and Washington.

I walked in his tavern about 5:30 that evening, and when I walked in the door, Seyward poured me a double shot of Granddad, and a Budweiser beer for chaser. That was my beer — Budweiser — "one Bud for one stud." *[Laughter]* And I drank that double shot, and I drank that beer. And I had to go to the restroom.



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And while I was in the restroom, Seyward came in the restroom. He says, “John, come on out man, and get one for the road.” And I looked at the guy, I was shocked and surprised. What the hell is he talking about? — “get one for the road” — I just walked in this joint. Sure enough, we walked out, I looked at my watch: it was midnight. Now see, there’s quite a few hours that I had lost. See, I begin to have blackouts five and six in one twenty-four hour period.

I walked out of the restroom, I had another double and beer, and I walked out the tavern. I headed south on Washington, I lived on 17th. Before I got to 13th Street — now the tavern is on 12th Street — before I got to 13th Street, I blacked out again.

Coming out of the blackout, I was in a room. I was lying across a bed. I sat up, I looked to my left, there’s a girl lying there. And I looked at her. And I really stared. Because I knew she hadn’t passed out from alcohol — she had passed out from heroin.

And I accidentally looked to my right, and there’s a guy, stretched out, just like she was. And he was in the same condition. Now if I hadn’t’a looked to my right, I could have put two and two together, and I would have known what I was in there for, but when I saw him, this *baffled* me. *[Laughter]* So I looked diagonally to my right, and I saw this guy standing there with a tourniquet ’round his arm, with a syringe in his hand. And I knew all three — I knew the gal, and I knew the two guys.

And I says, “Say, man, what’s you doing?” He said, “Shut up, John,” say, “I’m trying to get a kick, man, I’m trying to get a hit.” He’s looking at me through the mirror. And I pointed to the girl, and he just nodded his head. Then I pointed to the guy, and he nodded his head.

Then I put my arms out like this, and he shook his head. Boy, you talking about getting the hell out of there! [*Laughter*] Whew!

### **For the first time, John really took his own inventory**

See, like I told you, I had been to A.A. in 1951, and I hung around eleven months, to know what the program was all about. So I took a quick résumé of my life, in other words, I took an inventory: The father of seven children. You have a good job. You have a good wife. You're buying a home.

And you're about to lose everything. What could you've told the judge if they had 've raided that room? See, when I walked out of Seyward's, it was midnight, but when I came to in that room, it was seven or eight o'clock that morning. It's only by the grace of God, while I was in there, they didn't pop that needle in my arm.

Now I knew I was an alcoholic, no question about it. I knew the recovery as far as alcoholism was concerned: the recovery is about 75% of the people recover, according the Big Book — said 50% recover, no relapse, never relapse; 25% have problems but they do recover. I knew that, but I didn't know the recovery for an addict.

### **But in spite of all that — one last drink**

This was a Tuesday morning. Now you would think something like that would stop a guy from drinking, but after I took that inventory and walked out of that hotel (or wherever it was, flophouse) I walked to one of my schoolmate's father's tavern. And he was working that morning, he was a Greek, his name was Tony Caiouphas, he was my classmate.

And I told Tony, I said, “Tony, give me a half pint of Granddad, man.”

He said, “Don’t have it, John.”

I said, “Well, what do you have old?”

He said, “Old Crow.” I said, “Well, give me a half pint of Old Crow, man.” See, back in those days you couldn’t drink a half a pint or a pint in a tavern unless you bought the setup — you could drink shots only.

And he gave me the half a pint, and I spanked that son of a gun on the butt, wrung his neck, he said, “John, you know you can’t drink it in here.”

I told him, “Well, give me my change, man.”

And he gave me my change, and I walked outside, and that was my last drink. That was September the 14th, 1960. I was sober.

My mother had a liquor store three blocks from where I was, and on the corner of Washington. I walked in there that morning, and she looked at me, say “O Lord, not again! Get outa here!”

See, I couldn’t even go in my mother’s liquor store, that’s how bad my drinking was. But I told her, “Well, this is it, I’ve had my last drink.”

She says, “Ahh! I don’t believe it.”

And about that time, usually, my wife was always looking for me. See, I didn’t have a car, and my wife’s oldest sister drove around. And my three-year-old son walked up to me (he’s forty-two years old now), and grabbed me by the hand, and he led me to the car where my wife was.

You know, that was the first time in my duration of drinking that I had money left, and all I did is, I went in my pocket, and I handed the money over to her. I told her, “I’ll be home pretty quick.”

## John Shaifer on the Twelve Steps

I realize tonight that I'm an admitted alcoholic: I have accepted the fact that I can't drink; I have accepted the fact that my life is unmanageable unless I let God help me manage my life.

I was at a meeting this morning and they were talking about motives, and one guy spoke about the Four Absolutes: Absolute Honesty, Absolute Purity, Absolute Unselfishness, and Absolute Love. And you know, I fall short after thirty-eight years?

**The first step**, ladies and gentlemen, is the only step that I have been able to maintain perfection, a day at a time. Now some of you might be new: I got news for you, when I get up in the morning, I'm new on this program. See, I don't have it made; I'm still striving for perfection. I'm a hundred per cent better tonight, than I was [back in 1960 on that] Wednesday, which was the 16th of September, [when] I went back to my group, the Midtown Group. I'm a hundred per cent better as far as character is concerned.

But I still don't have it made. It all depends upon my maintenance today, whether or not I'll be sober tomorrow. I know I'll be sober, but what I'm speaking about is my spirituality.

I fall short of the mark. If I was satisfied, I wouldn't be here tonight. I'm still active in the program; I'm still active in service work. I usually make maybe two or three of the general assembly meetings in the state. I'm a GSR — I guess I've been GSR about eighteen times, treasurer about ten times, secretary about eighteen times, chairman about eighteen times. But I'm still learning; I'm still trying to master this program.

**Your second step**, "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." I might fly off the handle

twice a year. That's good, for me, 'cause I used to fly off the handle every day, three or four times a day.

I have to be awful particular as far as my association is concerned. Most of my friends are sober people. About the only people that I associate with in the morning, at McDonald's, at 5:30 in the morning, is about nine guys I meet, and out of the nine, it's three of us on the program, but [the other six] don't know it. See what I mean? And when they get to talking off the wall, well we look at each other.

**Your third step**, "Made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as we understood him." I make decisions every day, with God's help. I have a program. I plan my program tonight before I go to bed, what I shall do.

But I know sometimes, my higher power will intervene, and I recognize that — see, I used to get angry — I recognize that, and I take it with a grain of salt.

They'll tell you, don't make any major decisions your first year on the program, and I kind of agree with that. I like what my sponsor told me. He said, "Lot of people come in the program and they start talking about relationships." Well, he told me, says "Your first relationship . . . you already married, John . . . your first relationship should be with your higher power, getting to know him better."

See, that's where so many young people relapse. They looking for a relationship, and both of you stoned as hell, your mind is pickled! *[Laughter]* I don't know about you, but it took me three years to get some sense up here — three years around the program before I really understood what you meant about the steps.

And like I said, I work one, two, and three every morning. I ask God to



Guide my faltering footsteps,  
And don't let me fall.  
Be patient with me,  
Because this way of life is steep to me.  
But if I keep my feet till evening time,  
Night will bring rest.  
Then stronger grown,  
Tomorrow climb with a newer zest,  
with the help of the higher power.

See and then the inventory step: I was rather fortunate, I took **steps four and five** with Father John Doe. I made about fifteen of his retreats down at Gethsemani in Kentucky. A wonderful priest.

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Father Ralph Pfau (Nov. 10, 1904–Feb. 19, 1967), who was based in Indianapolis, was the first Roman Catholic priest to get sober in A.A.

Father Ralph conducted a weekend A.A. spiritual retreat once a year at Gethsemani Abbey, the famous Trappist abbey near Bardstown, Kentucky, where in 1948 a monk named Thomas Merton wrote *The Seven Storey Mountain*.

Father Ralph, writing under the pseudonym of “Father John Doe,” was the author of the fourteen Golden Books (the first one came out in 1947) and was one of the four most widely-read early A.A. authors.

The other three authors were Bill Wilson of course, Richmond Walker (the author of *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*), and Ed Webster (author of *The Little Red Book*). See Glenn F. Chesnut, *Father Ralph Pfau and the Golden Books: The Path to Recovery from Alcoholism and Drug Addiction* (2017).

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**Sixth step.** Are you willing “to have God remove all these defects of character”? Yes John, John is willing. Well, he sure hasn’t removed all of ’em, but he’s removed my grosser defects of character. I’m still working on it, like I told you in the beginning.

**[Seventh step]** “Humbly asked Him to remove my shortcomings.” I constantly ask him to remove my shortcomings.

There was a time when I walked in the house with a wife and seven children in the house, and I always would walk in the kitchen, the wife say, “Get the hell out of here! Well, wash your hands! What are you looking in them pots for?” And I look at the garbage disposal and it’s running over. And there are bags in the cabinet. And I just couldn’t understand: why didn’t somebody empty that damn garbage?

And boy, I take off raising hell, and I made the mistake of going to the meeting that night. And Bud told me, say “John, what’s wrong with you emptying the garbage, man? *[Laughter]* Don’t you live [in that house too? Why don’t you just put the garbage in the bags] and shut your damn mouth? You’ll feel a lot better, and you won’t work your blood pressure up.” *[Loud laughter]* So ladies and gentlemen, I been emptying garbage thirty-eight years. *[More laughter]*

Or when I walked in the bathroom, and sit on the john, and when I’m done, I [reach over and there’s no toilet paper on the rack. And somebody at the meeting say, “Don’t you have to pass by the closet where you keep the extra toilet paper] before you enter the bathroom?”

I said, “Yeah.”

He says, “What do you have eyes for, John? You look and see if there’s a roll on the rack. And if it ain’t, you take one with you.”

And that's what I started doing. I'm still opening up the new bar of soap. Can't nobody put that toilet tissue on that rack but me, *[laughter]* and I do it every day. I used to get angry. I did it this morning, but I don't get angry anymore.

Just like there're kids squeeze the toothpaste tube in the middle. I'm a perfectionist, I squeeze it at the bottom. *[Laughter]* Sometimes it bursts. And I made the mistake of going to the meeting, telling my peers around the table.

They say, "John, buy your own toothpaste" — back then a tube of toothpaste didn't cost but fifteen cents — "then put it in your drawer. Lock it up if you have to *[laughter]* or put a lock on your door."

See, with five sons, when I got ready to go to a meeting, I didn't have no drawers or socks. *[Laughter]*

And they told me, "Lock it up."

"Lock it up from my children?"

"Lock it up, John!" *[Laughter]*

So very seldom . . . I have to watch out for the blind spots, as far as my shortcomings are concerned. I'm a much better guy today.

And I made the list, long list, as far as **step eight** says. I've worked **step nine**. I'm still working **step ten**. Still working at **step eleven**. Still working at **step twelve**.

## HOW TO GET SOBER AND STAY SOBER

And all I can say to the new person tonight is, whatever you doing to stay sober, continue to do whatever it is you're doing. And I'd like to shoot a few clichés to the new people. I want to tell you,

Turkeys don't soar with eagles.

If you want to get hit by a train,  
put your butt on the track and you'll get hit.

And if you sleep with a dog tonight,  
you know darn well when you wake up in the morning,  
you're going to have some fleas on you.

And I tell you something else,

When you pray for good harvest,  
don't you forget to reach for the hoe.

You'll have no harvest unless you work for it, and that's for sure.  
See, prayer is good, but after you get up off your knees, you better  
get busy. See, because nothing's gonna be done until you start  
working, see.

And associate yourself with sober people,  
and sober people you'll imitate.

And that's true. And then this is the last little cliché:

Meetings are important.

When I first came in, I made meetings every night, on Saturday I  
made three. I did that for about thirty years. These last four or five  
years, two meetings will keep me in good grace, as far as my  
thinking's concerned. Then sometimes I have to fall back to seven,  
because of my thinking.

And I like to say to that young person, if you don't make  
meetings, your chances of staying sober is like a snowball in hell,  
you ain't gon' make it! [*Laughter*]

Just remember, you gotta hang with me,  
or hang with us, 'cause in that first step,  
In the WE is the KEY.

I had to turn ALL them partners down: a guy I used to drink with, a guy I'd known for thirty-some years — but I had to turn him down, 'cause I knew he still drank. And I have no business in a tavern, or where booze is sold, or in a liquor store. When I did smoke, I go to the grocery store and get my cigarettes.

I don't smoke anymore; I don't drink anymore. And I owe it all the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, the greatest fellowship on the face of the earth, bar none. And all I had to do was make meetings — [and] keep an open mind, be honest, and the willingness — these are indispensable. And I like to thank you for listening to me.



## **PART III**

# **Washington, D.C.**

**April 1945**





## CHAPTER 20

### **Dr. James C. Scott, Jr. — the national fight for black rights**

Jim Scott, who founded the first black A.A. group in Washington D.C.<sup>71</sup> in April 1945, was the first black person to get a story in the Big Book: “Jim’s Story” in the second edition (which came out in 1955, and was the last edition of the Big Book which Bill Wilson was involved in). His story continued to be included in the Big Book even after Bill W.’s death, and was included in both the third edition and the current fourth edition.<sup>72</sup>

Dr. James C. (“Jim”) Scott, Jr., M.D., the son of a skilled black physician in Virginia, was sent to Washington D.C. during his boyhood for both elementary school and high school, and then went on to Howard University, one of the two top historically black universities, where he eventually earned his M.D. degree. He started out, in other words, as very much a member of the professional class (doctors, lawyers, college professors), even though alcoholism, which is no respecter of education or class, eventually brought him low.

I say this only because it is important to understand that alcoholism among black Americans is no different than it is among white Americans: it is not a disease which afflicts only the members of one particular social category. Rich or poor, educated

or uneducated, law abiding or criminal, the people who sit in a typical A.A. meeting will represent every segment of modern American society. And that will be just as true of the black alcoholics who come into that meeting as it will be of whites.



### **Howard University**

When we look at the years he spent as a student at Howard University, Dr. Scott's willingness to join the black revolution which began starting black A.A. groups all over the United States in 1945, suddenly makes good sense.

Howard University is located in the heart of Washington D.C., just two miles or so north of the United States Capitol Building, the Smithsonian Museum, and the White House. It was founded in 1867, and named for General Oliver Otis Howard, who had been put in charge of the Freedman's Bureau (the government agency assigned the task of integrating the newly freed slaves into society and politics) at the end of the American Civil War in 1865. General Howard then served as the university's president from 1869–1874.

From 1942–44 (that is, during the period just before Dr. Scott founded his pioneering black A.A. group in the city), Howard University students had conducted what they called “stool-sittings” in which they conducted sit-ins and pickets at cigar stores and cafeterias around Washington, D.C., which were refusing to serve black people. (This of course was the method copied in the national civil rights movement later on, from 1955 into the early 1960’s, to integrate various whites-only establishments all across the U.S.)



Howard University, with the Washington monument sticking up in the background over on the right.

Alain Locke (1885-1954), who was chair of the philosophy department at Howard University, had been the famous author of the book called *The New Negro* (1925), which became a landmark in American black literature, and

the foundation statement of the Harlem Renaissance. Ralph Bunche (1903 or -04 to 1971), chair of the department of political science at Howard, was involved in the formation of the United Nations and in 1950 became the first African American to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Stokely Carmichael (1941-1998), who earned a degree in philosophy at Howard in 1964, was a famous member of the radical wing of the civil rights movement: he was a member of SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and participated in the Freedom Rides organized by CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality). In 1966, Carmichael started the Black Power movement, and in 1967 co-authored the book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. He was connected for a while with the Black Panther Party as its "Honorary Prime Minister."

Dr. Scott, in other words, was an educated black man of the professional class who was trained at one of the major twentieth century centers for the more radical wing of the black struggle for empowerment. In his story in the Big Book, he nevertheless kept his criticism of contemporary white society somewhat muted:

I don't think I suffered too much as far as the racial situation was concerned because I was born into it and knew nothing other than that. A man wasn't actually mistreated, though if he was he could only resent it. He could do nothing about it. On the other hand, I got quite a different picture farther south. Economic conditions had a great deal to do with it, because I've often heard my father say that his mother would take one of the old time flour sacks and cut a hole through the bottom and two corners of it and there you'd have a gown. Of course, when father finally came to Virginia to work his way through school, he resented the southern "cracker," as he often called them, so much that he

didn't even go back to his mother's funeral. He said he never wanted to set foot in the deep south again and he didn't.<sup>73</sup>

On the other hand, we can only read his opening sentence here with great sadness: "I don't think I suffered too much ... because I was born into it and knew nothing other than that." In fact, in 1945 (when the black A.A. group in Washington D.C. was founded) Jim Crow laws in the south and de facto imposition in the north of most of the same restrictions blocked black Americans at every turn. Dr. Scott, along with most other African Americans of that time, had become so used to racial discrimination that they often did not even become fully consciously aware of it unless it was particularly cruel and blatant.

In the 1940's, we need to remember, African Americans were regularly forced into their own separate public schools (greatly underfunded and inferior), made to sit in special places on buses and trains (and in their own segregated waiting rooms at the stations). When they were traveling, they had great difficulty finding a restroom anywhere which they would be allowed to use. White hotels (whether in the north or in the south) would not give them a room for the night. If they were lucky, they might find a white restaurant which would allow the black kitchen staff to sell them some food at the back door of the building, where they would have to stand out in the alley to eat their meal. In the South, public drinking fountains would be labeled with large signs saying "white" or "colored."

In 1954, the year before "Jim's Story" was put in the second edition of the Big Book, segregation in the public schools was finally declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education*. In the next year (1955) Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr., began his career as a leader in the Civil Rights Movement by starting the Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama. Or in other words, putting Dr. Scott's story in the Big Book in 1955 was part of a general shift in American attitudes towards race which was taking place at that time. A lot of the more blatant Jim Crow laws and practices were finally officially outlawed during the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, followed by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Getting these new policies actually applied in practice, of course, initiated a long, painful struggle which is still going on today, over fifty years later, but in the 1950's and 1960's, we can nevertheless see the essential beginnings being made.

In 1955, when he wrote his story for the Big Book, Dr. Scott was beginning to become aware of the injustices being perpetrated by white racists in America, as were many other black Americans of his generation. This would have been particularly true in his case, as we have noted, because of his education at Howard University. But he was also willing to give credit to the white people within the Alcoholics Anonymous movement who helped him and his fellow black alcoholics during the beginning years of his Washington D.C. group:

Charlie, my sponsor, was white, and when we got our group started we got help from other white groups in Washington. They came, many of them, and stuck by us and told us how to hold meetings. They taught us a great deal about Twelve Step work too. Indeed, without their aid we couldn't possibly have gone on. They saved us endless time and lost motion. And, not only that, but they gave us financial help. Even when we were paying that two dollars a night, they often paid it for us because our collection was so small.<sup>74</sup>

## **People who helped Dr. Scott get sober**

Dr. Scott started the first black A.A. group in Washington D.C. (the third such group in the nation) with the help of his non-alcoholic wife Viola M. (“Vi”) Scott, along with the aid of another non-alcoholic black woman named Mrs. Ella B. Gant (who first put Dr. Scott in touch with A.A.), and a white A.A. member named Charlie G. who made the twelfth step call on Jim and became his sponsor.

Dr. James C. Scott, Jr., M.D., was born on November 25, 1903. He was 41 years old when he came into Alcoholics Anonymous and got sober. He died on April 8, 1962. His wife Vi lived to be 101 years old: she was born on December 10, 1901 and died on April 28, 2003. The two are buried in Warrenton Cemetery in the little town of Warrenton, Virginia, fifty miles west of Washington, D.C.<sup>75</sup>

Roughly half way between those two towns (Warrenton and Washington, D.C.) is a place called Manassas, which was the site in July 1861 of the First Battle of Bull Run, the first major land battle of the American Civil War (also the site of the Second Battle of Bull Run at the end of August 1862). The Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862 (which pitted General Robert E. Lee against Major General Ambrose Burnside and involved scenes of massive butchery) took place only forty miles south of Warrenton.

So Dr. Jim, who fought and won the battle to gain entry to A.A. in the nation’s capital for black alcoholics like himself, was buried (along with his supportive wife Vi) in the middle of a dark and bloody ground where all too many of the white people in the United States had taken up guns and done their best to keep black

Americans in bitter slavery only forty years before Jim and Vi were born.

The Civil War was still not ancient history for black people in the United States in 1945, when the first black alcoholics came into Alcoholics Anonymous. It was not a curiosity which you just read about in books or were taught in boring classes in school. Even this late in the twentieth century — in 1945, when the first black alcoholics came into the A.A. program — almost every black man or woman who was 80 years old or older had been a slave, and was willing to tell their grandchildren what it had been like: not only the grueling, backbreaking labor under the burning hot sun, the meager food, and the pitiful shacks they were given to live in, but the constant fear of beatings, and the way all too many white men who were slave owners had forced themselves sexually on the slave women on their estates.

### **The public push for full black inclusion in Alcoholics Anonymous: 1953–1955**

Dr. Scott's story was put in the second edition of the Big Book, which came out in 1955. The chapter on the Third Tradition in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*,<sup>76</sup> which was designed to serve as a Bill of Rights for Alcoholics Anonymous, had come out two years earlier, in 1953, and made it clear that A.A. had to “cut across every barrier of race ... and language” (page 141).<sup>77</sup>

Note: when the first black groups were begun in A.A., the earliest was started on January 24, 1945 in St. Louis (where **Father Ed Dowling** had started the first A.A. group in the city in October 1940 and was still actively associated with the groups). The second (the Evans Avenue Group) was



begun in March 1945 in Chicago (where they asked **Earl Treat**, the founder of Chicago A.A., for ninety days to see if they could make a black A.A. group work, and he agreed).

What is important to observe here is that two of Bill Wilson's major advisers and helpers in writing the *Twelve Traditions*, and then in writing the book on the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* — Father Dowling and Earl Treat — had been closely associated with the founding of the first two black A.A. groups.

When the statement was made on page 141 in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* that A.A. had to “cut across every barrier of race ... and language,” the people who made sure that line appeared in the book meant it with total seriousness.

To help drive this point home — that black alcoholics had to be allowed to join A.A. — Bill Wilson had Dr. Scott as the first speaker at the “God as We Understand Him” meeting held Sunday morning at the Second A.A. International Convention held in St. Louis on July 1-3, 1955. (The second edition of the Big Book, with Dr. Scott's story in it, was also introduced at this convention).<sup>78</sup>

Bill W. described that speech — the one which Dr. Scott gave at the Second International — in *A.A. Comes of Age*:<sup>79</sup>

Deep silence fell as Dr. Jim S., the A.A. speaker, told of his life experience and the serious drinking that led to the crises which had brought about his spiritual awakening. He re-enacted for us his own struggle to start the very first group among Negroes, his own people. Aided by a tireless and eager wife, he had turned his home into a combined hospital and A.A. meeting place, free to all. He told how early failure had finally been transformed under God's grace into amazing success, we who listened realized that A.A., not

only could cross seas and mountains and boundaries of language and nation but could surmount obstacles of race and creed as well.

## CHAPTER 21

### **Dr. James C. Scott, Jr. — “Jim’s Story” in More Detail**

#### **Two important black women in his story: Dr. Scott’s wife Vi and Mrs. Ella Gant**

At the St. Louis A.A. International (and in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*) as we have seen, Bill Wilson singled out Dr. Scott’s wife Viola (“Vi”) for praise along with Jim himself.<sup>80</sup>

He re-enacted for us his own struggle to start the very first group among Negroes, his own people. Aided by a tireless and eager wife, he had turned his home into a combined hospital and A.A. meeting place, free to all.

Vi’s obituary (she lived to be 101 years old) may be found in the *Washington Post* on or about 28 April 2003.<sup>81</sup>

#### VIOLA M. SCOTT

On Monday, April 28, 2003, beloved wife of the late James “Doc” Clark Scott; devoted mother of Shirley E. Lee, Frankie S. Crosby and James C. Scott. She is also survived by nine grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren; nine great-great-grandchildren; a host of other relatives and friends.

The late Mrs. Scott will lie in state at Kingdom Hall, 14th and Hamilton Sts., NW, Friday, May 2 from 10 a.m. until service at 11 a.m., Brother Thompson, officiating. Interment Warrenton VA. Services handled by Stewart.

**The black community's memories  
of the group which Dr. Scott started  
in Washington, D.C.**

On Sunday, March 22, 2009, the Reeves Club in Washington, D.C., held its Fourth Annual A.A. Old-Timers Speakers Jam. This event, which lasted from noon to 7 p.m., was a celebration of the Cosmopolitan Club, the first black A.A. group in Washington. Every hour, the group read portions of "Jim's Story" in the Big Book, which told how Jim got sober back in 1945. All the speakers were old-timers, each of them with over twenty years sobriety.<sup>82</sup>

## HISTORY OF THE COSMOPOLITAN CLUB

*(Put together by Dicker S. and printed in the programs)*

In April of 1945, Mrs. Ella B. Gant, a non-alcoholic arranged a meeting between Charlie G., a white man and sober member of A.A., and Jim S., a black man and an alcoholic who was still drinking. Mrs. Gant had known Charlie when he was drinking and he had told her about how A.A. had helped him. Upon hearing his story, she arranged for the two to meet.

Out of that meeting was born the Washington Colored Group, the first black AA group. The group survived with the help of Charlie G., Bill A., and Chase H. of the Old Central Group (D.C.'s pioneer group of Alcoholics Anonymous).

Stories of our group have been handed down from one generation of recovering drunks to the next. One story is that sometimes there would be no one at the meetings, except Jim and his wife, Vi S.

Jim S., in his story, reveals that “They came, many of them (white AA’s) and stuck by us and told us how to hold meetings,” and how to do Twelve Step work. Most of the Twelve Step work was done at a new alcoholic clinic located at 7th & P Street, N.W. It was at this clinic that the group met Julius S., whose sobriety dates from 1945 and who is the sole survivor of that small band of recovering people.

The groups’ first meeting were held in the home of Mrs. Gant. They then met several times in the home of Mrs. Gant’s mother. The Group of approximately fifteen men and women, with sobriety ranging from a few weeks to one year, grew to nearly thirty members in the second year.

Jim S. began to seek space for a meeting. He approached several ministers who praised what he was doing, but they did not offer space. He then approached the Anthony Bowen YMCA at 12th & S Streets, N.W. The Y rented a room to the group for \$2.00 per night.

In this second year, the group’s name was changed from the Washington Colored Group to the Cosmopolitan Group of Alcoholics Anonymous — an indicator that all suffering alcoholics were welcome regardless of race. That group tradition remains in effect today.

Often, a YMCA employee would come to the meeting room door, and beckon two or more members, then leave the room, on their way to “Carry the Message.”

These pioneers began to take their message to other cities: Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York City and

Fredericksburg, Virginia. Members of the group also included traveling salesmen, with all the energy of a crusaders, who took the message up and down [many other parts of] the East Coast as well.

In 1947, the House District Committee of the 80th Congress held the first Federal hearing dealing with alcoholism and the need for rehabilitation. At the hearing, Julius S. of our group testified that he had not had a drink for 18 months ....

In 1950, the D.C. Police Court allowed A.A. into the courtroom where meetings were held on Saturday mornings. Bob C., a probation officer, began sending probationers to the Cosmopolitan Group. At a later date, attendance at the weekly A.A. meeting became one of the conditions of release.

It was at the 1955 A.A. Convention, held in St. Louis, that our founder, Jim S., became the first black person to address a national A.A. Convention.

In 1970 or '71, the group moved to the Petworth Church located on Grant Circle of Northwest Washington, and from there in 1975 to the Peoples' Congregational Church. Currently, we meet at the Emory Methodist Church, every Monday and Friday now at 8:00 p.m. We've been here since April, 1993.

Jim S.'s story reveals that in the first few months of his sobriety, he gathered up alcoholics in an attempt to save the world. He wanted to give this new "something" to everyone who had a problem. Well, his story concludes, "We didn't save the world, but we did manage to help some individuals."<sup>83</sup>

**Henry L. Hudson's 1985 article:  
Mrs. Ella B. Gant**

We have some additional information about Ella Gant (a black woman, not an alcoholic, who helped Dr. Jim Scott) from an article written by Henry L. Hudson, B.A., C.A.C., the Director of the Staff Counseling Unit at Montefiore Medical Center, in *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*.<sup>84</sup>

A Black woman, Mrs. Ella G., who was a friend of Jim's family, had developed an interest in alcoholism through church work and because of an alcoholic brother. Through her efforts to help her brother, she had become knowledgeable about alcoholism and the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. Mrs. G. had made the acquaintance of a sympathetic White AA member, who had a strong enough commitment to AA principles, and he was willing to "twelve step" a Black alcoholic. She suspected that Jim had a drinking problem, and arranged for a meeting between him and Charles S.

**Washington D.C. was actually the third  
black A.A. group started, not the first**

Dr. Jim Scott's story in the second edition of the Big Book, which came out in 1955, describes him at the very beginning of his account as "the originator of A.A.'s first colored group." And in his story he states that when he met Charlie G. and three or four others at Ella Gant's this was "the first meeting of a colored group in A.A., so far as I know."<sup>85</sup>

And in *A.A. Comes of Age*, which came out in 1957, Bill Wilson tells how “Dr. Jim S.... re-enacted for us his own struggle to start the very first group among Negroes, his own people.”<sup>86</sup>

The “History of the Cosmopolitan Club,” put together by the A.A. old-timers in Washington, D.C. in 2009, likewise refers to “the Washington Colored Group [as] the first Black AA group.”<sup>87</sup>

So by 1955, the people in the New York A.A. office had clearly forgotten that they had material in their own files showing that St. Louis had actually been the site of the first black AA group, and apparently the New York A.A. office never even realized that the Evans Avenue group in Chicago was a black A.A. group. So in New York, in all good conscience, they believed that the Washington D.C. group was the first black A.A. group. (And the St. Louis group was deliberately staying as invisible as was possible, and begging the New York A.A. office not to mention them in the *Grapevine* or anywhere else for fear that white racists would attack them and try to drive them out of A.A.)

For this reason the black A.A. members in Washington D.C., along with Dr. Scott himself, seemed to have simply assumed that what the New York A.A. office was saying was true.

This was not so, however, as has been pointed out ever since Ernest Kurtz’s famous history of A.A. came out in 1979. It is now known that Washington D.C. was the third black A.A. group, founded not only after the St. Louis group, but also after the Chicago group.

This does not take away, however, from Dr. Scott’s heroism. He was moving into a completely unknown world, in a nation where



black people were routinely excluded and treated badly, and he nevertheless established a group there in Washington, D.C., the nation's capital, which grew and prospered, and spread black A.A. to Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York City and Fredericksburg, Virginia, along with many other places on the East Coast.

And Dr. Scott became a major symbol in Alcoholics Anonymous in 1955 for the need to start accepting black people into A.A. here in the United States totally and universally at all levels, and for the need furthermore to eliminate any kind of racial discrimination in A.A. against any people or race anywhere else in the world where groups had been started.

### **One wing of early A.A. emphasized the spiritual side**

There were two major wings in early A.A., one which emphasized the psychological aspects of the program, and the other which emphasized the spiritual.

In the early days, the spiritual wing of early A.A. went to Emmet Fox's *Sermon on the Mount* for inspiration, or they went to classical Protestant liberalism of the type taught in the Southern Methodist publication called the *Upper Room*. Then when Father Ralph Pfau (the first Roman Catholic priest to get sober in A.A. and one of the four most-published early A.A. authors) began publishing his Golden Books in 1947, it was not just Roman Catholics in A.A., but large numbers of Protestant members who began turning to Father Ralph for help in understanding the spiritual side of the program.<sup>88</sup>

When Richmond Walker in the next year (1948) published his little black book called *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* down in Daytona Beach, Florida — a beautiful introduction to a profoundly spiritual interpretation of the A.A. program — this little volume

quickly turned into the second most-published book in A.A., exceeded only by the Big Book itself.<sup>89</sup> When Jimmy Miller, the First Lady of Black A.A., came into the program in 1948 up in the Chicago area, she almost immediately obtained a copy from Florida of the newly-published *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* book. She based her program on (1) reading the mediation in that book every morning, (2) reading from one of the copies of the A.A. Grapevine which she kept on an end table in her living room, and (3) the careful study of the A.A. Big Book.

### **The opposite wing emphasized the psychological side of the program**

But there was another wing of early A.A. which instead emphasized the psychological aspects of the program.<sup>90</sup> In the earliest period, most of them tended to be Neo-Freudians. Unlike Sigmund Freud himself, Neo-Freudian psychiatrists like Erik Erikson, Harry Stack Sullivan, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, and Alfred Adler tended to look, not just at the first three years of our lives, but at the whole course of our childhoods, including our experiences in elementary school and later during our teens, and including the impact of numerous people (such as school teachers, fellow students, neighbors, and people in authority) as well as our relationship with our mothers and fathers.

### **Jim Scott's childhood and teen years: the origin of the psychological problems which later drove him to drink**

In good Neo-Freudian fashion, Dr. Scott's story in the Big Book made a careful listing of some of the traumas he experienced during his childhood and teens, including such things as:<sup>91</sup>

I remember in my early youth my mother dressed me just as she did my two sisters, and I wore curls until I was six years of age. I found that even then I had fears and inhibitions.

An incident took place in grade school that I have never forgotten because it made me realize that I was actually a physical coward. During recess we were playing basketball and I had accidentally tripped a fellow just a little larger than I was. He took the basketball and smashed me in the face with it. That was enough provocation to fight but I didn't fight, and I realized after recess why I didn't. It was fear. That hurt and disturbed me a great deal.

My point of view on the opposite sex wasn't entirely like that of most of the boys I knew. For that reason, I believe, I married at a much younger age than I would have, had it not been for my home training .... She was the first girl that I ever took out.

And so at the A.A. International in St. Louis, Dr. Scott described himself at the end of his drinking career, as "Nothin' but a little kid, though I was forty years of age."<sup>92</sup>

That was because we tend to become emotionally stuck at the point in our early years where the trauma first hit home. We never fully grow up emotionally past that age. So around the A.A. tables, we will encounter people like a sixty-year-old woman who reverts, under pressure, to her emotional state when she was nine years old and her mother and father separated: feeling lost, alone, frightened, and about to lose everything that was important in her life. Or we find a fifty-year-old man, a tough looking Korean war veteran who lost part of his foot to a Chinese mortar shell, who (when he first came into the program) would revert under pressure to his

emotional state when he was twelve years old and forced to remain in bed for most of a year after he came down with rheumatic fever. A grown woman falls back over and over again into the behavioral patterns of a rebellious and headstrong thirteen-year-old girl (that being the age at which she was raped). An adult man continues to act like a know-it-all sixteen-year-old boy and gets in trouble from that over and over again.

When alcoholics come into the A.A. fellowship they meet other people around the tables who serve as good fathers and mothers, good older brothers and sisters, good grandfathers and grandmothers, who re-parent them, so to speak, and teach them how to grow up emotionally and start acting like responsible adults.

Early A.A.'s were told to read and re-read three parts of the Bible: the Sermon on the Mount, the letter of James, and 1 Corinthians 13. It is that last recommended reading that is important here: there in the thirteenth chapter of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Christians in the city of Corinth, we read in verse 11 — "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways."

At the psychological level, Dr. Scott found that the A.A. program healed his painful childhood traumas and helped him grow up and start acting like an adult when he was faced with things that made him angry or frightened or frustrated or unhappy.

His serious drinking had begun, he said, about ten years before he came into the A.A. fellowship. At that point the emotional burden of his childhood and teen-aged years finally grew too big to handle: "A lot of things [began] to accumulate, a lot of things started to snowball. Some of these I was actually aware of, others possibly were deep seated in the subconscious."<sup>93</sup>

***The power of the subconscious:*** Jim Scott had an M.D. degree, the basic degree for psychiatrists, and although he did not go into that branch of medicine, he nevertheless fully understood about the psychological power of the *subconscious*. Even though we may have ceased to think about some of those early memories at the conscious level, they will still continue to affect the way we make decisions after we are adults.

This is part of the purpose of the fourth step (and seeing a good psychiatrist or psychotherapist if that is additionally necessary): to come to a better conscious understanding of what caused all the resentment and fear which drove us to drink, to put these issues down on paper, and then to learn how to start healing these deep inner wounds.

**Dr. Scott also came into the program  
with highly negative views about spirituality  
and the church**

We must note the way in which Dr. Jim's statements about religion and spirituality in his story in the Big Book were uniformly negative:<sup>94</sup>

We lived just a few doors from the First Baptist Church and when they had funerals I remember very often asking my mother whether the person was good or bad and whether they were going to heaven or hell. I was about six then.

My mother had been recently converted and, actually, had become a religious fanatic. That was her main neurotic manifestation .... mother drilled into me ... a very Puritanical point of view as to sex relations, and as to motherhood and womanhood. I'm sure my ideas as to what life should be like were quite different from that of the average person

with whom I associated. Later on in life that took its toll. I realize that now.

We weren't even permitted to play cards in our home .... The only time that I have ever seen my mother take anything alcoholic was around Christmas time, when she would drink some eggnog or light wine.

[In 1940, after suffering his first blackout while drinking, I] talked with a minister .... He went into the religious side and told me that I didn't attend church as regularly as I should, and that he felt, more or less, that this was responsible for my trouble. I rebelled against this, because just about the time that I was getting ready to leave high school, a revelation came to me about God and it made things very complicated for me. The thought came to me that if God, as my mother said, was a vengeful God, he couldn't be a loving God. I wasn't able to comprehend it. I rebelled, and from that time on I don't think I attended church more than a dozen times.

And in fact, in his story in the Big Book there was no mention of any way at all in which God or a Higher Power or prayer or meditation or the spiritual dimension had played any role in getting Dr. Jim sober in 1945 or keeping him sober during the years which followed.

### **Finding a higher power**

But at the conclusion to his talk at the A.A. International Convention in St. Louis, Dr. Scott said that when he came into A.A. in 1945, his sponsor Charlie G. introduced him to a higher power who could heal his life:

I came back home [to Washington, D.C.] and there is when I found my sponsor. Where I found a God that I can understand. In A.A., I learned that God is not up there, not some old man with a beard, with a stick to beat us every time we make a mistake — that he is a loving God, that I can talk with Him, that I can rely on him.

That every day when I reach the cross roads, that I can known that he is there. I know that whatever my problem might be that it can never be larger than the God that I understand.

It's a beautiful thing, to come into A.A., to get the basic knowledge, and somewhere else along the line, something else creeps in. And we know for ourselves that behind all the miracles we see transform in A.A is a kind and loving God .... And God Bless you all.

In A.A., Dr. Scott not only found freedom from the compulsion to drink, but also a new kind of life, where he no longer found himself harming all the people around him (including even his closest and dearest family members and the patients who came to him trusting in his medical skills). He was no longer destroying himself over and over by his own actions. And above all, as he said, “it’s a beautiful thing” to discover “a kind and loving God” watching over our lives at all times.





## CHAPTER 22

### **Dr. James C. Scott, Jr. — at the St. Louis International in 1955**

The following material is taken from a transcript of the talk which Dr. Scott gave at the Second A.A. International Convention held in St. Louis, Missouri on July 1–3, 1955 at the Kiel Auditorium. Around 3,800 people attended.



The A.A. International gathered in the  
Kiel Auditorium in St. Louis in 1955

It was one of the most important international conventions in the history of Alcoholics Anonymous. A new system of governance had been devised for A.A., to take over from Bill and Dr. Bob, where the principal governing body would

now be an elected General Service Conference. The five-year trial period for that system had been concluded, and it was now agreed, by the unanimous acclamation of the convention, to make it permanent.

A.A.'s new circle and triangle symbol was displayed on a fifteen foot wide by twenty-five foot long banner hanging in front of the curtains at the back of the stage.

The second edition of the Big Book was published just in time for the convention. The first 164 pages were left unchanged, but only eight of the original stories were retained: Bill Wilson's story, Dr. Bob's story, and six others.

The rest of the original stories were replaced with thirty new stories, one of these being "Jim's Story," in which Dr. James Scott, M.D. described his recovery. This was the first story about a black man or woman to be included in the Big Book. In honor of this, Dr. Scott was asked to speak at the convention.

### **Bill Wilson himself introduced Dr. Scott**

Our first speaker is Jim from Washington. Jim's Story appears in the new A.A. book, second edition. And I suppose the starting of Jim's group in Washington is one of the epics of A.A., and Vi, his good wife has probably sheltered more drunks under her roof than anyone else in AA. I'm not going to eulogize Jim, he can very well speak for himself. [*Applause.*]

### **Dr. Scott then began his talk**

My name is Jim Scott and I think I can prove to your minds that I am an alcoholic. I drank pathologically for a period of about ten years. I realized that possibly many of you drank for a much longer period of time but in the ten years of my drinking I think maybe I fell from the fourth rung of the ladder certainly to the bottom ....

Skipping now over the initial parts of his talk, we finally come down to 1935, the year he turned 32, when he began his serious drinking.

.... [In 1935] a lot of things to accumulate, a lot of things started to snowball. Some of these I was actually aware of, others possibly were deep seated in the subconscious. I know that at a very early age I had been introduced to alcohol. The booze of the poor basement Prohibition days. The corn whiskey, the moonshine and what not.

But I realized in '35 that I wanted to drink, that I felt the need of the drink. I would go and steal my own whiskey. Eventually Vi asked me why I was drinking alone, I lied to her, under the pretense that I had a cold, that I wasn't feeling up to par. And the majority of you know the story from there on out. It certainly didn't stop there. I went on from that stage to the stage where I would bring the whiskey into my house, drink it and hide the bottle.

Then came the accumulation of bottles and I'd have to lie again. Because they weren't mine, they belonged to my brother-in-law who happened to be living with us. They were his bottles, they weren't mine. I knew nothing about them.

Then came the stage where I looked forward to the weekends to drink. It didn't interfere with my normal way of life, it didn't interfere with my family, it was my business, and if I chose to take a few drinks over the weekend, then it was my business. But there again it was just a matter of time, when the Saturday drinking and the Sunday drinking turned into Monday drinking. Then came the time when I had to have the morning drink. And from there on out I had to increase the morning drink until I was drinking a half a pint to get straightened out in the morning. Then came the time

when even a half a pint wasn't sufficient to get rid of the jitters. And of course you all know what happened from there on out.

It went from bad to worse until it got to the place that I drank daily, day in and day out. Until in '41, an incident happened that gave me a shock. A very dear friend of mine had been in the night before, he paid me a bill he owed me. And on the following night, he came back and said I forgot to pay you for last night's prescription for my wife. I said, no, you don't owe me anything. He said, yes, don't you remember. I didn't remember. I didn't remember prescribing anything, I don't remember giving him anything. The following morning I went to this friend's home, he had gone to work, I talked with his wife, checked the medicine was O.K.

But I said to Vi, something had to be done. It was all right for me to lose my automobile, it was all right to remember having been in a party at 11 or 12 o'clock, getting home at 4 and not remembering where I had been, what had transpired, those were bad enough, but this was too much. I knew then I had to do something about my drinking.

It was at this point that I sought the aid of psychiatry. I signed myself into a hospital, a mental institution. It was at this time I sought help from the clergy. But none of them could give me the answer. The psychiatrist told me that I was basically dishonest, that I may have known, that I may not have been cognizant at the time. The clergy told me I was too far away from God, but they couldn't tell me how to find him. The general practitioners said I drank too much, I should moderate. Not one of my good friends had told me that I would have to leave it alone completely. That I couldn't drink it at all. They didn't know. They only knew possibly a little

about the individuals who drank periodically. They only knew that they could possibly help me over a binge.

In the later part of '41, after I realized there was no help for me, I came to the conclusion, that maybe my environment was responsible. Most of my friends were drinking possibly far too much, I wasn't the only [one] in trouble. There were many of us. Many of us would go to parties and unable to drive home. I realized also that I had to close my office. I had no other alternative than to secure a job, so I went to one of my good friends , who secured [me] a position [at a government agency]. I worked there a while and I drank more, I believe because I had a steady salary. All I had to do was put in this seven hours, eight hours, and the rest of the time was mine to drink.

Then came the time, around September '41, I went to Winston-Salem, it was a dry city. I don't know why it didn't dawn on me that there would be some bootlegging in North Carolina, but it didn't. I told Vi, I've got this licked, that's all there to it. We'll meet new friends, there'll be a new environment, and I will be a different man. I'm the drunk who's sincere, and I was sincere.

The agony I had brought upon my children, the agony I had thrust upon my wife. Of course at this point she would no longer go out for social gatherings. This point in my drinking, she was my worst enemy, and not only would I abuse her, I would fight her. I think she's a remarkable woman to have put up with it as long as she did, but of course eventually she tired of it, she did something about it. But she was long-suffering. We were going to Winston-Salem and everything is going to be all right .We are going to start life anew, we are going to make these new friends and we are going to live once again as human beings.

I went to Winston-Salem and stayed sober about a month or six weeks, because I went on ahead, secured a home, a beautiful house, beautiful garden, little swimming pool. I knew Vi and the children would really enjoy it. I couldn't do this thing whole hog, I refused to drink whiskey but I did drink beer and plenty of it. And for some reason I was never able to drink enough beer for it to affect me too much.

After six weeks I wrote Vi and suggested she and the kids make tracks south. It happened to be just around Christmas time, it never dawned on me that she needed some money. So when I mailed a little token prior to this, a lousy \$12 — twelve dollars — not incidental, to bring our Christmas supply of liquor. We must celebrate this Christmas.

So the good wife, instead of coming to Winston-Salem, she wrote me a very beautiful letter stating that she had secured a job in Washington and she thought for the time being that it was best that she remain there, for the sake of the children and their schooling. And you can imagine what happened then. I drank for less than that reason, but that in my mind was a genuine reason, and I drank more than I had ever consumed in Washington. I lost a great deal of time from work because of my drunken spree.

Eventually came the time I could no longer stay in Winston. I had to come back to Washington. My wife and I came back together. We were now reduced to a room and a kitchen. We cook in this room, we sleep in this room, we entertain in this room. We were reduced to that at this point. Once again we were going to lick this thing together, and once again I was complete failure.

It was at this point in July of '44 that we finally decided, with the aid of the district attorney of the commonwealth, that I should go and live with my mother and that I should not molest my wife

under any circumstances. This thing actually grieved me because I'm still deeply in love with my wife. But I'm forced into this thing, until eventually I guess I got into some pretty serious trouble about it.

I'm an alcoholic and I'm not able to face life like the average individual. Men lose their wives by the thousands, they are able to give them up, to substitute something else. I wasn't. Even though I wasn't a fit husband and I knew that, but I still felt she was giving me a raw deal leaving me out in the world all by myself. Nothin' but a little kid, though I was forty years of age.

Somewhere in the month of November [1944], I had a payday on the 23rd. The 25th being my birthday, I had to celebrate. I couldn't go back to work the 24th, and I had to take the 25th because it was my birthday and I had to celebrate.

But this happened on the 24th. I don't know how I arrived at this destination, whether it was by car, I walked, or streetcars. I remember meeting my wife on a street corner — she was just leaving this home, this room, and I can see her now as plainly as I did that day — I don't remember one word that I said to her. I don't remember any of the incidents that transpired after that. The only thing I remember around 9 o'clock that night is two detectives and a police knocking on my door at my mother's home. They come in and ask if Jim Scott lives there. Yes. I had at this point — almost in a drunken stupor — I asked them what they wanted. They said we want you for assault. "Assault on who?" One Viola Scott. No, you have the wrong man. I haven't assaulted her. Of course, I was taken to the precinct and booked.

There about 2 o'clock that night, or early the next morning, I was informed that my wife had been released from the hospital. That I had taken a small pen knife and stabbed her on the arm and

in the thigh and in the region of the kidney. This I had no knowledge of, certainly a man having assaulted an individual would not have gone to his home, and stayed there and waited quietly for a policeman to come. The following morning at the arraignment in the court, a very stern judge was presiding over the case. And for some reason or the other, he turned to my wife and he said, "Madam, what have you to say?" And she said, "Judge, your honor, my husband is a fine man, but I really think he's gone nuts, he's gone crazy." The judge said, "If that is your opinion, I will abide by it. I will commit this man to a hospital for thirty days."

Instead of the hospital I was thrown into the city jail. The closest thing to a psychiatrist I saw was an internist, and took a test. Approximately on the 25th or 23rd I believe of December, I was brought back into court. My good wife has decided, through the efforts of my mother and some of my relatives, she decided anyhow that she didn't want to prosecute me. I was released. Again, I became a hero. My wife had did me this great favor and I thought that once again I would have to leave, and I did.

I went to Seattle, Washington. At least if I couldn't do anything about my problems, certainly I would be a long ways from my people. At this stage, I believe I had lost all of my faith and I just about reached a point of desperation where I just didn't give a dollar about what happened to me. If death would have come in those days, I would have been glad. I didn't have the guts to take my own life. I had thought about it, the easiest way to do it. To make a long story short, I went to [Seattle] Washington.

An incident happened and once again I thought about my home and my family. In April or March 1945, I had made up my mind that I was going to send money to my wife. But then one thing that



I hadn't taken into account: that I would have to pass a liquor store after I got my pay envelope and before I reached the post office. Vi never got that check.

After a couple of weeks, I came back home and there is when I found my sponsor. Where I found a God that I can understand. In A.A., I learned that God is not up there, not some old man with a beard, with a stick to beat us every time we make a mistake — that he is a loving God, that I can talk with Him, that I can rely on him. That every day when I reach the cross roads, that I can know that he is there. I know that whatever my problem might be that it can never be larger than the God that I understand. It's a beautiful thing, to come into A.A., to get the basic knowledge, and somewhere else along the line, something else creeps in. And we know for ourselves that behind all the miracles we see transform in A.A. is a kind and loving God .... And God Bless you all.

Dr. James Scott was a good man, a truly heroic figure, and a worthy representative to put forward in 1955 in the attempt to start bringing more black alcoholics into A.A. By his own labor, and by the example he set, he was responsible for saving the lives — and bringing the grace of God — to tens of thousands of people.



## **PART IV**

# **Joe McQuany**

**Sober March 10, 1962, the first  
Joe and Charlie tapes were recorded  
on December 15, 1977**



## CHAPTER 23

### **Joe McQuany: the Most Famous Black Figure in A.A. History**

*The most famous black leader in early A.A. history, and one of the most influential teachers of A.A.'s second generation, was Joe McQuany* of the Joe and Charlie tapes: the detailed Big Book studies which the two of them put together have been listened to by literally hundreds of thousands of A.A. members all over the world since they were first recorded in 1977.

Joseph Daniel McQuany (November 16, 1928 – October 25, 2007)<sup>95</sup> was a black man living in Little Rock, Arkansas, who created these lessons by teaming up with Charles A. Parmley (April 8, 1929 – April 21, 2011),<sup>96</sup> a white man from Maysville, Arkansas, which was about 230 miles away, right on the Oklahoma border.

When Joe McQuany first got sober in Little Rock in 1962, he became the first black person to join A.A. in Arkansas, and one of the first black people in A.A. in the entire American Southwest.<sup>97</sup> At the time he came into the program, it was only four and a half years since Little Rock had been shaken by the famous high school integration riot and the tense confrontation between Arkansas National Guard soldiers (initially 289 of them) sent by the segregationist governor of Arkansas to prevent black children from

entering the high school building, and the 1,200 soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division who were sent from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, by President Eisenhower on September 24, 1957, to force the governor to back down, and oversee the total Arkansas state force of 10,000 National Guardsmen. The President had federalized them to take them out of the governor's control and then ordered most of them to mobilize in uniform at their home stations, where they were kept busy with marches and drills, under the careful watch of the Fort Campbell troops, until things calmed down.

Among many of the white citizens, there was as a consequence still an extraordinary atmosphere of anger and hatred towards black people in Arkansas when Joe McQuany came into Alcoholics Anonymous four and a half years later.

### **The attempt to end racially segregated schools had begun in the United States in 1954**

It had started when the U.S. Supreme Court, on May 17, 1954, had ruled unanimously in *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education*, that segregated school systems — one set of schools for white children and another set of schools for black children (with separate school buildings and an entirely different group of teachers) was “inherently unequal” and violated the U.S. Constitution.

So on September 4, 1957, the first day of school in Little Rock, nine African-American students came to the doors at Central High School, hitherto the whites only high school, and tried to enter the building. A thousand local white people gathered in an angry, shouting mob to block the nine black children from the school doors, and in addition Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus sent in

soldiers from the Arkansas National Guard, as we have noted, to surround the high school and prevent any black children from entering.



Newspapers and magazines all across the United States printed photos like the famous one from *Life* magazine (shown above) showing little Elizabeth Eckford, a nicely dressed, slightly-built sixteen-year-old black girl, standing outside the school building. Holding her school notebook and handbag protectively over her chest with her left arm, she is surrounded by a crowd of tough middle-aged white women, who are glaring and scowling and shouting angry, hateful curses at her, with the Arkansas National Guardsmen holding billy clubs but doing nothing to protect her. I was only eighteen years old myself, living in Louisville, Kentucky, but I remember these and similar photos all too well.

Another well-known set of photos from the Little Rock mob scene shows a black newspaper reporter being assaulted by a gang of angry, murderous looking white men, who hit him with their

fists, shoved him to his knees, and then kicked him viciously in the stomach.



An Associated Press photo shows a life-sized effigy of a black man hung by the neck by a hangman's noose from the limb of a tree in a yard across from the high school, while a weak-chinned, ineffectual-looking white high school boy tries to "show his manhood" by slugging the hanging figure with his fist — a reminder, to all the young black boys and girls present, of the Ku Klux Klan lynch mobs with their burning crosses which had terrorized the black population for years, not just in the South, but also in the American Midwest and West.





It would also be well to remember that the Klan attacked, not just black people, but also Jews and Roman Catholics, and the newer immigrant groups in the country.

As we noted, President Eisenhower eventually had to order elite troops from the 101st Airborne Division (the “Screaming Eagles,” the famous World War II paratrooper unit) into Little Rock to control the white mob and force Governor Faubus to let the students enter the high school.

But in spite of that, later that year, Melba Patillo (one of the nine black students, a little girl only sixteen years old) was kicked,

beaten, and had acid thrown in her face. Gloria Ray (just fifteen years old) was pushed down a flight of stairs, and Gloria's mother was fired from her job with the state of Arkansas when she was ordered to withdraw her daughter from the school, and she refused.<sup>98</sup>

### **PTSD-like symptoms can occur in the victims of racism**

In a way impossible to fully understand for people who never went through it, being black in the United States of America in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s could leave a black man or woman with something much like PTSD (post-traumatic shock disorder). This is important for understanding the kind of healing processes that may sometimes have to be worked through by black alcoholics and addicts after they join the twelve-step program.

If we look at the Mayo Clinic's current description of that disorder, we can see the possible effects on black people who were victims of a particularly vicious racist act, or targets of long cumulative chains of lesser acts of discrimination and attack. The Mayo Clinic lists, as some of the symptoms that may appear among victims of PTSD (in the case of victims ranging from war veterans to survivors of torture to some of the people who have experienced sexual assault, and beyond):<sup>99</sup>

#### Intrusive memories

Recurrent, unwanted distressing memories of the  
traumatic event

Reliving the traumatic event as if it were happening  
again (flashbacks)

Upsetting dreams about the traumatic event

Severe emotional distress or physical reactions to  
something that reminds you of the event

Avoidance

Trying to avoid thinking or talking about the traumatic event

Avoiding places, activities or people that remind you of the traumatic event

Negative changes in thinking and mood

Negative feelings about yourself or other people

Inability to experience positive emotions

Feeling emotionally numb

Lack of interest in activities you once enjoyed

Hopelessness about the future

Memory problems, including not remembering important aspects of the traumatic event

Difficulty maintaining close relationships

Changes in emotional reactions (called arousal symptoms)

Irritability, angry outbursts or aggressive behavior

Always being on guard for danger

Overwhelming guilt or shame

Self-destructive behavior, such as drinking too much or driving too fast

Trouble concentrating

Trouble sleeping

Being easily startled or frightened

**Joe McQuany's journey from the old  
riverboat city of Louisville to the insane  
asylum in Little Rock, Arkansas**

Joe was brought up in a southern world in which anti-black laws and customs were often enforced in open and unapologetic fashion. He was born in Louisville, Kentucky, the old southern riverboat town on the Ohio River that was home to the famous Kentucky Derby horse race, mint juleps made with Kentucky bourbon, rolled oysters, and the turkey-and-bacon Hot Brown

sandwich.<sup>100</sup> His father and mother were named Kelly McQuany and Ada Beaty McQuany.<sup>101</sup>

As Joe put it in his own words, he eventually became a wandering “drunken black bum.” He drank his way through Tennessee, and then spent a while in Kansas City, before finally finding himself in Little Rock, Arkansas in the early 1960s, at the peak of the American civil rights uprisings, in one of the major centers of all the racial prejudice and violence. As Joe put it, “It was not a good time to be black and drunk.”

He finally tried to enter Little Rock’s only alcoholism treatment center, but was told that it was for “white men only,” and was informed that black male alcoholics were sent to the segregated black section of the Arkansas State Hospital for the insane, which was located about thirty miles southwest of Little Rock, near Benton, Arkansas. Joe described this as “a real snake pit.” The local people who lived in that area called it the “Nut House.” (Women alcoholics, whether white or black, could not be admitted to either place, and had jail as their only recourse.)<sup>102</sup>

### **Finding A.A. in the Arkansas State Hospital for the insane**

It was 1962, the year Joe turned 34, and his situation seemed to be a grim one. There were a few white alcoholics, however, already trying to carry the A.A. message into the segregated black section of the insane asylum, including a white man named Charles Clark (1919-1993), who was going to come to Joe’s aid. There is a portrait at Serenity Park with a name plate that reads: “Charles Clark 1919 – 1993 Joe’s Sponsor for 32 Years” (not the same as the Charlie Parmley of the Joe and Charlie tapes.)

But in fact — not to take any credit away from Charles Clark — by the 1980's, Joe McQuany was not relying on him so heavily any longer, and had become closer to a couple of other people: Sherry Hartsell in Gilmer, Texas, said that he asked Joe directly who his sponsor was at some point in the early 1980's, and "Joe responded to me that he and Charlie P[armley] (and perhaps Wayne P.) sponsored each other."<sup>103</sup>

Joe counted March 10, 1962 as his sobriety date,<sup>104</sup> when it was the promise of a pack of Camel cigarettes that lured Joe to his first A.A. meeting, where he was taught how to stop drinking. Cliff B., one of the people whom Joe sponsored, talks about what happened next.

(I should say that Cliff, who comes from Dallas, explained in his 2007 lead how he got Joe McQuany to be his sponsor. He had assumed that Joe was white, but when he met him at an A.A. meeting in Little Rock, found that instead he was "black [and] bald ... [but] had the most beautiful smile I have ever seen." He also says he found that Joe was "the most loving, compassionate person I have ever met.")

Cliff tells how Joe got sober in the insane asylum:<sup>105</sup>

He was smoking cigarettes at that period of his life and the only smoking material available to the inmates was tobacco in a bag and papers that came with it. They were called "roll your own" cigarettes as a smoker placed some tobacco in one of the thin sheets of paper, rolled it into the form of a cigarette, licked the loose side of the paper which then sealed the tobacco in and it was ready to be smoked. The [marijuana smokers] of today become very adept at that process.

Of course, coming off a bad drunk, Joe's hands were pretty shaky so he had to give his tobacco and papers to one

of the inmates who would roll it, lick it and hand it back to him to be smoked. As his mind cleared, the thought of putting that cigarette in his mouth became a little repulsive considering who had licked it.

One day, he was sitting and doing nothing when another alcoholic who had checked himself in for the same reason as Joe asked Joe if he would like to go to a meeting on drinking. The guys who did the meeting brought in a thermos of fresh coffee and a carton of Camel cigarettes which were given to those who attended the meeting. Joe started to reject the invitation suspecting that the men who were coming would talk about the evils of drinking.

He had heard enough of that but he reconsidered as he thought about the slobbers of the nuts who licked his “roll your own” so he agreed to go just to get a cup of fresh coffee and a package of “ready rolled” cigarettes. He was very surprised to learn the men were not there to talk on the evils of drinking. Rather they were there to tell their story of being victims of alcoholism and of the solution they had found in Alcoholics Anonymous.<sup>106</sup>

Joe was so impressed by what was said by Charles Clark (the white A.A. member who came to talk at the meeting in the black ward of the insane asylum) that he came up afterwards and asked Charles to be his sponsor. And as was noted, the sponsorship relationship was going to last for 32 years until Charles Clark finally died in 1993.<sup>107</sup>

Joe had never heard of Alcoholics Anonymous and was very impressed with Charles’ story. After the meeting was over Joe went up to Charles and said, “Man, I sure like what you said, but what do you think I ought to do?” Charles looked at Joe and said, “Fella, I just told you what I do. I don’t give a damn what you do. That is your business but if

you want this thing, I'll help you." So Joe was on his way. He had the willingness to do what was necessary to survive alcoholism.<sup>108</sup>

### **Going to A.A. meetings in Little Rock**

When Joe left the insane asylum and began trying to go to a regular A.A. meeting in Little Rock, he immediately confronted the forbidding face of racial prejudice, made worse by the lingering effect of the school integration crisis in that city only five years earlier. As Joe said, "Little Rock was no place for a black man to be looking for help in 1962." The A.A. group finally let him attend, but with the proviso that that Joe was not to arrive early, not to stick around after the meeting was over, and not to drink their coffee.<sup>109</sup> And we need to remember that in those days in Arkansas, a black man simply coming into a white area of a town was automatically in danger of police harassment, or being called foul names by some of the white people standing around, or even being beaten up or killed.

But Joe McQuany persevered, and kept on coming to the A.A. meeting. And his wife Loubelle, equally courageous, started attending Al-Anon meetings in spite of similar resistance from white racists within the Little Rock Al-Anon group, and kept supporting her husband in his newfound sobriety.<sup>110</sup>

Racial prejudice loaded Joe down with one special handicap. He could not take the A.A. group as his higher power, even on a temporary basis, and he could not depend on a long list of telephone numbers of other A.A. members whom he could call if he was feeling pressured, or rely on a host of other sources of strength which white A.A.'s could draw from the group. "As a

black man he would be left out of the social bonding that's such an important if informal part of its program.”<sup>111</sup>

This did have one good effect later on, however. After Joe had been in the program for a while, his own experience drove him to begin organizing new A.A. groups where black people would be welcome.<sup>112</sup>

### **A spirituality based upon studying history and the A.A. Big Book**

***Joe McQuany developed a style of spirituality which was built, not upon the spirit of fellowship, but upon studying history and telling the stories of courageous historical figures who were cast in the role of pioneers, innovators, and lone wolves who had to make it with minimum help from others — a method especially appropriate for those who were marginalized, socially excluded, and psychologically isolated within the surrounding culture.***

For Joe, “the isolation from fellowship meant the Big Book was his primary source of recovery information,”<sup>113</sup> which meant that it played a direct role in creating in Joe a style of spiritual discipline which depended on studying the Big Book over and over again, and meditating on all its stories and historical detail, as the primary route to God and the higher spiritual life. And in the years since Joe and Charlie put together their tape recordings, I have seen them play a major role over and over again with all sorts of people who, for whatever reason, felt themselves to be among the dispossessed, despised, and outcast from the greater society: ex-cons, former drug smugglers, people from outlaw motorcycle gangs, and so on.





Joe McQuany and Theodosia Cooper

### **Theodosia Cooper**

While Joe was still at the insane asylum, he got to know a black woman named Theodosia Cooper, who was a psychiatric social worker there.<sup>114</sup> She was four years older than Joe, a Baptist minister's wife and a teetotaler. She had started out as a social worker who worked with special needs children, the deaf, abused children, prostitutes, and the like. But she had also become concerned about the plight of the alcoholic, and had attended the Yale University Summer School for Alcohol Studies, where she got to meet Bill Wilson and learn at firsthand about A.A. methods for the treatment of alcoholism. From her position as a psychiatric social worker at Little Rock's state hospital, she spotted the newly arrived Joe McQuany, and became determined to help in any way that she could in getting him sober.

What struck Theodoshia about Joe was that “He was educated, and he wasn’t angry or defensive like the other black men in the hospital.” It came as no surprise to her, she said, that McQuany would become an internationally known author and teacher of the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous. “He was a little too humble at first,” she said, “but he really knew how to work with people.”<sup>115</sup>

Over the years that followed, Theodoshia

. . . worked side by side with McQuany in his efforts to overcome segregation at the state hospital and in A.A. meeting rooms, and helped him launch Serenity Park treatment center where she also served as a member of the board of directors.<sup>116</sup>

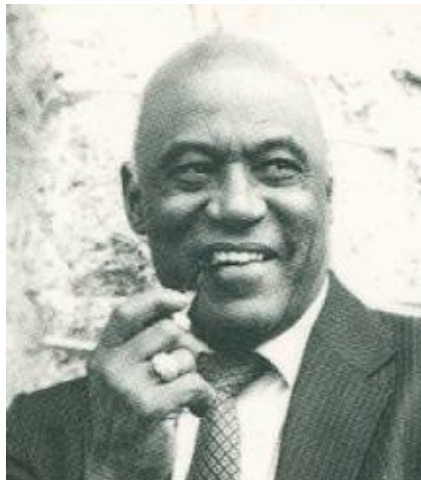
Theodoshia and Joe McQuany decided to turn the black A.A. meeting at the state hospital into Arkansas’s first desegregated A.A. group by getting three white men to begin attending the meeting: Charles Clark (the man who served as Joe’s sponsor for 32 years), Bill White, and Neil Verdock.<sup>117</sup>

When a group of black alcoholics in Dumas, Arkansas (ninety miles southeast of Little Rock) wanted to start an A.A. meeting there at the Masonic Hall, Charles Clark volunteered to assist them. On the day of the opening meeting, Joe McQuany and Theodoshia Cooper set off for Dumas in separate cars, and Arkansas state troopers stopped them and threatened them with arrest. It took a good deal of calm talking by Joe and Theodoshia to persuade the troopers to let them proceed on to Dumas. Especially back in those days, for black men and women, something as simple as getting in an automobile and driving a few miles down a public highway could easily turn into a frightening ordeal.<sup>118</sup>

### **Joe McQuany began taking on the role of an A.A. teacher in 1964**

In his book, *The Steps We Took*, Joe McQuany explained how he got started as an A.A. teacher.<sup>119</sup> The A.A. group he belonged to had a speaker meeting every week, and on Tuesday evening, what was supposed to be a discussion meeting dealing with the twelve steps. It must have been around 1964, when people at the Tuesday meeting asked him,

“Why don’t you take a Step and explain it to us?” I had about two years in the program at this time, and I was an old hand! I really didn’t know anything either, but since they asked me, I studied it so I could talk to them about it and we could discuss it. Well, after we had been going three or four years, we had about five or six people who knew the Steps, and I said, “Let’s switch this to a discussion meeting.” But one of the members, named Esther S., said, “You’re doing alright. Just keep doing what you are doing.” So that’s the way we got this meeting started.



Joe McQuany

Then we moved to the old Serenity House in 1973. The group would rent the meeting room there on Saturday night. People in other groups found out what we were doing and started coming. I think we had the meeting there from 1973 until 1983, when we bought Wolfe Street. During those years it grew until we didn't have the physical space. Sometimes we'd have a hundred people in that house on Monday night. People would say, "I'd really like to come to that meeting, but I can't get in." When we moved to Wolfe Street, the meeting really took off. We take twelve weeks to work through the Steps, with two weeks on Step 4 — and then we start over and do it all again. There are 250 to 300 people there every Monday night. They come from all the different Twelve-Step groups.<sup>120</sup>

### **The founding during the early 1970's of Serenity House and Recovery Dynamics**

There were so few treatment facilities for alcoholics in the United States at the beginning of the 1970's, that Joe McQuany decided something had to be done. He managed to obtain a \$330 federal grant and — with the aid of a few other charitable donations — started a program called Serenity House. They were in fact not able to obtain a house to use until they started holding a meeting at what was the original Serenity House in 1973.<sup>121</sup> They operated from there from 1973 until 1983, when they bought the Wolfe Street facility.<sup>122</sup>

Joe developed a highly successful method for teaching the principles of the twelve steps which he called "Recovery Dynamics." Other treatment centers began asking how they could set up Joe's kind of program at their facility. The first edition of the book Joe wrote to help them — Joe McQuany, *Recovery Dynamics*:

*Counselor's Manual* — was copyrighted in 1977 and the Kelly Foundation was incorporated the next year, in 1978, to help treatment centers that wanted to learn how to use the Recovery Dynamics model.<sup>123</sup> The latest edition of Joe's book, which came out in 1989, is out of print now, but a few used copies (which are currently selling for up to \$600 to \$2,200 a copy) are still available at rare book dealers.<sup>124</sup>

As of January 20, 2016, the Kelly Foundation website listed over forty certified treatment centers using the Recovery Dynamics model.<sup>125</sup> This includes two facilities abroad — one in Bristol, England and one in Puerto Serrano in Spain — plus thirty-nine in various parts of the United States:

Little Rock AR, two locations in Henderson KY, Campbellsville KY, Benton AR, Jeffersonville IN, Florence KY, four locations in Louisville KY, Paducah KY, Corpus Christi TX, Evarts KY, Corbin KY, Breaux Bridge LA, Huntington WV, Richmond VA, Raleigh NC, Lexington KY, Charleston WV, two locations in Mt. Sterling KY, Richmond KY, Conway SC, Radcliff KY, Ashland KY, Owensboro KY, Aspen CO, Jacksonville FL, Memphis TN, Port Matilda PA, Gilbert WV, Ocala FL, Lake Worth FL, Hopkinsville KY, Marksville LA, Jacksonville FL, and Ethel LA.

Serenity House itself — known today as Serenity Park, Inc. — operates today as a full treatment facility in Little Rock which accepts patients involved in all sorts of substance abuse. It furnishes outpatient, partial hospitalization and outpatient day treatment, residential short-term treatment, and residential long-term treatment options. There are also special programs for people with mental problems, people with HIV / AIDS, and programs for both men and women.<sup>126</sup>



## CHAPTER 24

### Joe McQuany: the Joe and Charlie Tapes

*It is important to note that Joe McQuany had begun developing this highly successful treatment method BEFORE he began speaking about the Big Book in public with Charlie Parmley:* Joe's studies in the Big Book were preceded by hands-on work with recovering alcoholics, where he learned from practical experience what had to be explained in alcoholics and addicts who were new to the A.A. program. His research into the history and ideas discussed in the Big Book was not some collection of abstract intellectual exercises produced by an armchair academic scholar. One reason the Joe and Charlie Tapes are so full of life and energy — and so compelling to the often very rough and tough alcoholics and addicts who listen to them — is because anyone who has also been there “in the trenches” can tell quickly that Joe McQuany had also been there in those same trenches where the life and death battle to save people's hearts and souls had to be fought.

*But also during the early 1970's, Joe became more and more convinced that the keys to the twelve steps lay in the study of the Big Book.* As early as 1971, Joe said, he had started to be convinced that a thorough knowledge of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* was vital to understanding how A.A. recovery was

best to be accomplished. But at first he had received only negative reactions from other A.A. members.

I began to study at this time [1971], and ...as I studied I found I began to get just a few insights into the Big Book. I began to share these things with other people — attempt to. But I found to my amazement very few people were interested in the Big Book. In my community I couldn't find anybody to talk to, and I began to wonder if I wasn't wrong. Maybe I was the only one who had this interest. In fact, I became somewhat of a nuisance around A.A. When they saw me coming they would run off because they didn't want to hear about the Big Book.<sup>127</sup>



Joe McQuany



## Joe McQuany met Charlie Parmley in 1973

It was two years later when Joe McQuany met the other member of the Joe and Charlie team, a white man named Charlie Parmley.

A note on Parmley: Charlie Parmley grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and served in the army in Germany at the very end of the Second World War. After the war, he spent a while working for the Spartan School of Aeronautics, first as an instructor and eventually as director of student admissions. After he married a woman named Barbara Herod, they moved to Maysville, Arkansas to farm. This was a little town, population 130, right on the border with Oklahoma. He was an outdoorsman, who loved farm chores like chopping wood. He came to A.A. and got sober in 1970, then met Joe McQuany in 1973 and started studying the Big Book with him. In 2011, just after he turned eighty-two, Charlie Parmley had a massive heart attack on the way home from a meeting, and died with forty-one years sobriety (half of his life).<sup>128</sup>

Joe and Charlie first met when Joe volunteered to introduce a man named Charlie P. as the A.A. speaker at an Al-Anon convention at the Roadway Inn in Little Rock, held in the Spring of 1973. And as he said jokingly in his introduction, “I was very disappointed in the speaker because I’d seen his name was Charlie P. and I thought it was going to be Charlie Pride. This guy wasn’t even the right color.”<sup>129</sup>

A note on Charlie Pride: Even though black string bands with fiddles, banjos, and guitars had played a major role in the development of American folk music back in the more distant past — the banjo after all, complete with thumb string and stretched animal hide head to produce its ringing

tone, was originally a West African musical instrument — by this time there were only three black men who had been able to make it big in American country-western music and gain admittance to Grand Old Opry circles: Charlie Pride, DeFord Bailey, and Darius Rucker. From 1969 to 1986, Pride came out with a long series of country music hits, like “Kiss an Angel Good Morning.” So Charlie Pride’s name (and his music) would have been known at this point to all the white A.A.’s who listened to country-western music.

As Joe explained in his book *The Steps We Took*, when he and Charlie Parmley began talking at the Al-Anon convention in 1973, he found, to his great delight, that “He was the first person I had met in Alcoholics Anonymous who was interested in what I was saying.”<sup>130</sup>

I found out he had a greater interest in the Big Book than anybody I knew. So we started studying together, and it was nice to have someone to talk to who was as interested as I was in studying it. We would make notes on our own, and get together and compare notes, and we began to find the underlying plan of the Big Book.<sup>131</sup>

It was 235 miles from Little Rock, Arkansas (where Joe lived) to Maysville, Arkansas (where Charlie lived), but in spite of that they arranged ways to meet regularly. Joe remembered how ....

At different times ... Charlie would ... come to Little Rock, and sometimes we would meet at different conferences. We would study the book together, and make notes, and ... over a period of years we were able to piece together the information we [would eventually include in our public Big Book studies]. Some weekends I would travel to Charlie’s farm on the hill .... and we would spend the weekend

studying the Big Book. This went on from about 1973 to 1977. We studied the book together for almost four years.<sup>132</sup>

In particular, one of their favorite ways to get together was to go to the same A.A. conference, and then visit one another's hotel rooms while they were there, to talk about their latest discoveries about the history and message of the Big Book. "We would ... put the pieces together like a puzzle," Joe said.<sup>133</sup>

But then these casual discussions between just Joe and Charlie began to turn into unofficial conference sessions held in private hotel rooms:

One day we were in a hotel room at a conference, and Charlie asked me if another guy, named Tiny, could sit in. I felt kind of funny about it, like the guy was barging in, but he sat in that night, and the next time some more guys sat in, and soon every time we'd go to one of these local conferences like Hot Springs or Tulsa or Eufaula or anywhere, we'd end up having an informal meeting on the Steps in one of the hotel rooms. We were never on the program or anything; it just got to be expected.<sup>134</sup>

Over the four-year period between 1973 and 1977, more and more people began sitting in at these informal hotel room gatherings until "finally the hotel room would be full at each conference on Saturday evening when we would study the Big Book."<sup>135</sup>

### **1977: the first recording of a Joe and Charlie Big Book Study**

In 1977, the first public Joe and Charlie Big Book Study was held and tape recorded in Lawton, Oklahoma. An A.A. member who had attended one of their private hotel room sessions asked

Joe and Charlie to come to his home group and present their Big Book study to a larger audience.

At that time I said, well I guess so if anyone wants to listen to it, but I can't imagine nobody'll want to listen to this all weekend. What we did — we went to Lawton, Oklahoma, and there were thirty-five people there that night we did the Big Book study. This is where the Lawton tapes were made. The first tapes were of the Big Book study that weekend.<sup>136</sup>

A tape recording (four tapes in all) was made of the sessions, and copies began quietly circulating around to other A.A. groups. Joe and Charlie slowly began to be invited to present their Big Book study at a variety of A.A. conferences and conventions. By 1980, the study was in his eighth revision.<sup>137</sup>

### **The healing of ethnic and racial divisions was starting to occur in vivid and startling fashion**

Charlie Parmley reported on the strange way it began to dawn on them, already as early as the first Lawton Big Book Study in 1977, that something truly extraordinary was happening here: some enormously powerful force was starting to cut through all the barriers that had heretofore separated the area's different ethnic and racial groups into suspicious and hostile blocs. Charlie said,

Just prior to Lawton Oklahoma I had some trouble with my ticker. We weren't sure if we were going to get to go. I remember Joe called me, and he said, Charlie, what do you think, are we going to go Lawton? And I said, Joe, we got to go. You know, we've committed ourselves, and we need to go.

He said, well, why don't I bring my car, and I'll drive to your house. Then you can ride, and I'll do all the driving, and you can rest. And I said, great, that'll be fine. Now, Joe drives from Little Rock, Arkansas to where I live in Maysville, Arkansas, two hundred and twenty-five miles. We get in Joe's car and we start toward Tulsa, Oklahoma. You can tell by looking at us that we're people that normally would not mix. [*audience laughter*] After all, he's bald-headed, and I'm not. [*audience laughter*]

On the way to Tulsa, Oklahoma, we're going to pick up another guy, the first fellow that I asked to sit in on us. He was going to meet us in the parking lot of the Hotel, Tulsa, Oklahoma. His name is Tony, last name is V. We picked Tony up. We get — all three — get in the car, and we're heading down the Turner Turnpike to Oklahoma City. Now, here's the black guy doing the driving. The Mexican, he's sitting over here riding shotgun. And the honky lying in the back seat, sound asleep. [*audience laughter*]

We got to Lawton, Oklahoma. We're doing the Big Book study, and we did this page. Just as Joe finished up ... I looked on the front row. The whole front row was filled with Indians from the Anadarko Indian Reservation.

That day we really realized what [a powerful thing was taking place:] We are people who normally would not mix with each other at all.<sup>138</sup>

### **Fear of the Ku Klux Klan**

Nevertheless, fear of attacks by the Ku Klux Klan and other anti-black racists and bigots was still very much alive in 1977. Sherry C. Hartsell describes how he invited Joe McQuany to give a lead at the anniversary celebration in Tyler, Texas, a city located a

hundred miles east of Dallas, in the heart of east Texas, during “that very snowy winter of 1977” (probably referring to the great blizzard of January 30, 1977).

An east Texas friend asked me to help get the speakers for the Tyler, Texas Anniversary in '77, I think. I was buying oil and gas leases up in North Dakota that fall and winter, called Joe from up there to invite him.

And he turned me down because, as he said, “Sherry, don’t you know they got the *Klan* in Tyler!” so I called my wife Beverly back in Nashville, Arkansas, and got her to call Loubelle and convince her, then I called Joe back again, and after agreeing that he could bring a carload of the boys from Serenity House, and my wife Beverly and I agreeing to stay with him and Loubelle, Joe finally agreed to come speak in Tyler that year.

I had Charley P. come down to introduce him (not do their Big Book Talks ... they had just begun doing their talks together the year before). I believe Joe claimed that was the first time he had spoken outside Arkansas — that gathering was attended by probably over a thousand, maybe 1,500 or more — a much wider audience than had ever heard him before, and he was soon booked well into the future.<sup>139</sup>

In fact, Hartsell commented, “within a year of that talk, Joe McQ. was booked up solid *five years* in advance, and within a short time after that, Joe and Charlie Big Book Talks were spread literally worldwide.”<sup>140</sup>

### **The A.A. International in New Orleans in 1980**

At the Seventh A.A. International Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1980, a man named A. Wesley Parrish set up the International Luncheon for 1,500 A.A. members from all around

the world, with the 89-year-old Lois Wilson herself as the Guest of Honor.<sup>141</sup>

Wesley .... was very enthused because he had been a student of the book for many years, but he had never really unlocked the total concept of the Big Book .... He was over the luncheon so, he seated each person. He knew where each person would be seated. So he chose the people to win these tapes. [*audience laughter*] He picked out the people to win these tapes so they would go back to all countries, to every state and every community. So actually this was when the great interest in the Big Book study began.<sup>142</sup>

When people took them home and listened to them, Joe and Charlie's fame began to spread, and within a short while they were putting on around thirty-six Big Book Studies a year. They eventually spread their message to all forty-eight of the states and most of the Canadian provinces, as well as Australia, New Zealand, England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and the Netherlands. It is estimated that at least 200,000 A.A. members ended up hearing them in person, in addition to all those who listened to copies of the tapes.<sup>143</sup>

*As an additional note:* Archibald Wesley Parrish (born Nov. 15, 1913 – died in 1985) had gotten sober when he was just turning 34 years old in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on November 13, 1947, and spent his early years in the A.A. meetings of Broward County, in southern Florida: both in Pompano Beach (where he seems to have lived) and in Fort Lauderdale. His wife's name was Rena. He was a member of the Broward County School Board from 1955-1965.

Two different sources say that Wesley Parrish was also the one who arranged the printing of the first copies of

Richmond Walker's *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* in 1948. Walker was by that time living in Daytona Beach, up along the northern coast of the Florida peninsula. After the *Twenty-Four Hour* book started to be used by A.A. members all over the U.S., Walker became the second most-published early A.A. author (second only to Bill Wilson himself).

Wesley Parrish loved to point out that the English word enthusiasm came from the ancient Greek word that meant having “God within.” The Greek word for “God” was *theos*, and their word for “in” was *en*, so the adjective *entheos* meant filled in our souls with the power of God and God’s divine inspiration. *Enthousiasmos* (enthusiasm) therefore literally meant “filled-with-God-within-ism.”

Wesley’s connection with propagating both Richmond Walker’s little black book and the Joe and Charlie tapes demonstrates the kind of enormous influence a single wise and seemingly divinely inspired person can have.<sup>144</sup>

### **A return to Big Book study needed to keep A.A. growth going**

Joe McQuany explained in one tape recording why he believed so deeply that serious Big Book study needed to be re-instituted in Alcoholics Anonymous. In the Mesa, Arizona, Big Book Study Tapes recorded in 1987, Joe stated quite bluntly that, in the fifty years since the Big Book was originally written, he had discovered, through his historical studies, that the A.A. program had been radically altered — in some cases almost beyond recognition.

In 1939, quite naturally, the people in the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous practiced the same program that was in the Big Book, “Alcoholics Anonymous.” They were



identically the same .... Nobody has ever changed the program in the book, but the program in the fellowship has gradually changed. You know, people change. We've added a few things; left out a few things; brought in some new things. In fifty years, the program in the fellowship, hardly, in some places, even resembles the program in the book.<sup>145</sup>

In his book *Carry This Message* (which came out in 2002), he explained further how he became convinced that this was connected with the enormous slowdown that began occurring in the expansion of A.A., particularly after 1990. This falling off of the growth rate is clear to see in the figures for total A.A. membership:<sup>146</sup>

| <u>Time Span</u> | <u>Total Members</u>               | <u>Growth</u> |
|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1935 . . . . .   | growth to 5 members . . . . .      | 5 x           |
| 1935-1939 . .    | growth to 100 members . . . . .    | 20 x          |
| 1940-1950 . .    | growth to 96,475 members . . .     | 965 x         |
| 1950-1960 . .    | growth to 161,549 members . .      | 1.7 x         |
| 1960-1970 . .    | growth to 311,450 members . .      | 1.9 x         |
| 1970-1980 . .    | growth to 907,067 members . . .    | 2.9 x         |
| 1980-1990 . .    | growth to 2,047,252 members . .    | 2.3 x         |
| 1990-2015 . .    | on a plateau at c. 2 million . . . | zero          |

Joe—who was not hostile per se to treatment centers (he started one of his own in Little Rock)—nevertheless came to believe that a major part of the problem came from the growth within A.A. circles of the wrong kind of treatment center mentality (that is, one based upon over-reliance on various faddish psychological theories) accompanied by a failure to read and study the Big Book, which was the basic textbook for the kind of A.A. recovery methods that had worked so well, particularly in the period from 1940 to 1950.

A.A. is not growing as fast as it once did, and there's a lot of conjecture as to why this is true. I think it might be because we have less A.A. in our meetings .... For the first twenty-five or thirty years, up until the 1960s, the message we heard in meetings was the same .... Groups still relied on the Big Book and the A.A. message. With the growth of the treatment center movement in the late sixties and early seventies, one of the biggest helps and one of the biggest hindrances to A. A. came along .... newcomers began to come to us with what they had been exposed to there — lots of therapies: transactional analysis, reality therapy, and many others designed to treat other problems .... And there has been a tendency for some of these ideas to dilute the A.A. message of recovery ....

Many of our meetings today have become “discussion” meetings, where people simply discuss their problems — like group therapy. Tradition Five says, “Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.” If we refocused on the Big Book, on the Twelve Steps, on our message, I think we would see a lot more recovery.<sup>147</sup>

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My own editorial note: It is my observation that it was not only the Big Book that stopped being studied during the 1990's, but also several other mainstays of A.A. literature. The four great A.A. authors during the period of A.A.'s phenomenal early growth were Bill Wilson of course, but also Richmond Walker (author of the little black book called *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, which was the second most-read work in early A.A.), Father Ralph Pfau (who wrote the fourteen *Golden Books* under the pseudonym of Father John Doe), and Ed Webster (author of the *Little Red Book*). The General Service Conference advisory of 1994 decreed that every book printed by the New York A.A. headquarters (which meant the books from whose sale they received royalty money) should have written on its title

page “conference-approved literature,” which caused A.A. groups all over the country to assume FALSELY that this meant that A.A. members should stop reading Walker, Pfau, and Webster.<sup>148</sup> If A.A. newcomers were no longer seriously reading those three authors OR the Big Book, then as Joe McQuany pointed out, all one had to do was to listen to people talking in meetings to realize that these poor souls were indeed wandering without direction in the dark.

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**Joe McQuany’s last and greatest honor:  
closing speaker at the 1985 A.A. International  
Convention in Montreal, Canada.**

Joe was around 57 years old, and was chosen to be the closing speaker at the Sunday morning spiritual session which closed the 8th International, the celebration of A.A.’s Golden Anniversary as a movement.

There were 44,000 attendees. Lois Wilson (now 94 years old, she died three years later) spoke to the group. Ruth Hock (Bill Wilson’s secretary, who typed the original manuscript of the Big Book) came out and received the five-millionth copy of that book. Dr. Bob’s son and daughter were both there, and Sybil C., the first woman to get sober in A.A. in Los Angeles.<sup>149</sup>

Then on the last morning, Joe McQuany was given the very special honor of delivering the final talk of the convention, at the spiritual session which brought the gathering to its end. Bob Pearson (1917-2008), a wise and good A.A. leader who was General Manager of the A.A. General Service Office in New York City from 1974 to 1984, described the scene in eloquent language:

Joe McQ.. the first black A.A. member in Arkansas, [gave]  
a soaring, spiritual message. As the multitude stood, hands  
linked, and recited the Lord’s Prayer in mighty unison, eyes

glistened and throats choked. Then smiles burst forth everywhere and people hugged each other as they said “I don’t want it to end!” and bade good-bye. There was even dancing in the aisles.<sup>150</sup>

### **Health problems**

For health reasons, Joe McQuany had already begun cutting back on his travels at the end of the 1990’s and then in 2003 he developed Parkinson’s disease. A white man name Joe McCoy began filling in for him. Joe McQuany struggled with his Parkinson’s health issues for the last four years of his life,. It was first diagnosed in 2003 when he was 75, and he finally died in 2007 shortly before he turned 79.

### **The closing of his life: giving of himself to help others until the very end**

Joe’s last project was to build a treatment center for women. The editorial tribute to Joe in the November 2, 2007 issue of the state-wide newspaper, the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, told the final story of his life — a triumphant one in spite of his illness:

The man never tired, not even during his last, four-year struggle with Parkinson’s, and he never stopped dreaming. His last great dream was a treatment center for women. When the ground was broken for that project two years ago, and folks asked where the money was coming from to finish it, Joe told the paper: “I had \$300 [when I started]. People said, ‘How are you gonna do it?’ I said, ‘I don’t know,’ and I stepped out. I’ve always stepped out into things, and people have always helped me.”

They did again. Construction was completed a few weeks ago, and Joe was there to admire the finished work. It was another of his dreams achieved.

He didn't seem surprised. Sitting on a patio overlooking the new building just days before he went into the hospital for the last time, Joe McQuany kicked back and observed, "It's gonna be okay."<sup>151</sup>

### **Shining with the aura of the divine light**

Joe McQuany, the tough, incredibly courageous man who had first gotten sober in Little Rock in the aftermath of the city's 1957 integration riot, nevertheless seemed himself to visibly glow, not with anger or hatred, but with the light of the divine love. It was the state-wide newspaper, the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, which wrote these words as part of the tribute it published for Joe McQuany on November 2, 2007, only a week after his death:<sup>152</sup>

Mainly people came to Serenity House not because of the books Joe McQuany would write, or lectures he would give, or the programs he devised, but because of Joe himself.

To quote one of his coworkers and admirers ... his soft, unjudging brown eyes would connect with the souls of others. Joe seemed to look past all the superficialities that separate us from one another and see within the whole creature, sinner man.

You may have met people like Joe on rare occasion — if you've been fortunate. They've got something special about them, a kind of almost palpable aura. And you never forget them. They're always there for you; they're always there for everybody. The short word for them may be saints.

Joe taught folks faith, or rather he would let them come to it. Much as someone might point out the quality of the light on a beautiful fall day, or a harvest moon shining above, or the grace all around us ....

At his death last week, condolences poured in from all over, including nearly every state in the Union and 10 foreign countries at last count.

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## **MAY GOD BLESS THEM ALL**

### **Joseph Daniel McQuany**

November 16, 1928 – October 25, 2007

### **Charles A. Parmley**

April 8, 1929 – April 21, 2011

### **Joe McCoy**

born c. 1939 – died age 75 on Nov. 24, 2014

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## APPENDIX I

### **Theodoshia Cooper, Black Psychiatric Social Worker and Friend of A.A.**

b. 1925, d. Dec. 16, 2016 at the age of 91<sup>153</sup>

The following is taken from David Palmer, "The Joe and Theodoshia story: Battling alcohol on the frontiers," *One Day at a Time*, Vol. 2, No. 2, June 2005.<sup>154</sup>

Theodoshia Cooper is the real deal. When she walks into a room in her three inch heels, heads turn, and people who don't know her whisper to each other, "who's that?" Theodoshia is a "somebody," and when she arrived at Serenity Park on a chilly, brilliantly lit morning in early March, she caused the usual stir. She was there to say a few words about Joe McQuany's Serenity Home for Women project — a new treatment facility in the making. As Theodoshia, 80, looked down from the outdoor podium at Joe, 76, who was seated in the front row, it was a tender moment and full of meaning for those who knew the background. Forty-four years ago, Cooper was the psychiatric social worker who helped McQuany get sober at Little Rock's state hospital. And together they helped change the course of treatment for alcoholics in the state, especially for blacks.



Theodosia Cooper



On one level they made an odd couple. Cooper, a minister's wife, had never taken a drink in her life and McQuany had been completely enslaved by alcohol. Furthermore they were miles apart in temperament — Joe quiet and thoughtful, Theodosia, smart and sassy. What they had in common was a strong faith in God and an intense desire to serve. And they were, and remain, magnetic personalities.

Theodosia goes to Yale after attending a symposium on alcoholism at Yale University the summer of 1961. Cooper reported for duty at the state hospital in Little Rock where McQuany, a recovering alcoholic, was one of her cases. What struck Theodosia about Joe was that "He was educated, and he wasn't angry or defensive like the other black men in the hospital." It came as no surprise to her, she said, that McQuany would become an internationally known author and teacher of the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous. "He was a little too humble at first," she said, "but he really knew how to work with people."

Cooper, worked side by side with McQuany in his efforts to overcome segregation at the state hospital and in A.A. meeting rooms, and helped him launch Serenity Park treatment center where she also served as a member of the board of directors. Today, Little Rock alone has hundreds of A.A. meetings and is widely known for its so-called "Little Rock approach plan" of recovery.

***The Country Girl:*** Cooper's country girl origins and rise to positions of influence and respect in the community is the stuff about which Broadway plays are written — think "Hello Dolly" and "Auntie Mame." She's got charisma. And that's not all. She's got a brain. And a heart. And there's a five-page résumé with all the degrees and a long record of service and caring for others to prove it. Born in Jennie, Arkansas, a tiny southeast Arkansas delta community in 1925, Cooper was orphaned at age 4 and went to live with an aunt and grandmother in neighboring Eudora where she was raised as an only child, worked in her aunt's beauty shop, faithfully attended church and went to the local schools

where she excelled. In her high school years, she was class valedictorian, class president, student council member, president of 4-H and also basketball queen. During these years she discovered her aptitude for leadership and motivation as well as compassion for the less fortunate of her classmates. “I always sat with the kids who seemed to be hurting,” she says. As for the boys, she says matter of factly, “I was a flirt. I could get anybody I wanted.” Case closed.

**Show biz beckons:** During these days she experimented briefly with local show biz, playing and singing with a group of girls whose specialty was imitating the pop singers of the time — the Mills Brothers, the Inkspots and even the Andrews Sisters — a bit of a stretch considering they were white. After her high school graduation she went to the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff for her freshman year and then transferred to Arkansas Baptist College in Little Rock where she graduated with a BSE degree.<sup>155</sup> During this time she also met and married Jobe Vaughn Cooper, a Baptist minister. She began her career as a science teacher at Eudora High School and in succeeding years her bent toward helping the disadvantaged led her to special education jobs in Jacksonville and Little Rock. When she wasn’t teaching, she took on social work research assignments in the field in St. Louis for the Catholic Board of the Children’s Guardian and the Methodist Settlement House. They took her to some dark places where prostitution, child abuse and drug abuse flourished, and this is where Cooper’s concern for the down-trodden and disadvantaged had begun to focus on alcoholism. During her working years she took courses at a variety of colleges and universities — University of Arkansas special education for the deaf, Eastern Michigan College special education for handicapped children, University of Oklahoma for special studies on poverty and program planning for the disadvantaged. And then came the summer school for alcohol studies at Yale. It was attended by the leading scientists and educators in the field along with lecturer Bill Wilson, co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous

with Dr. Bob Smith, and author of A.A.'s Big Book and 12-step program.

***A concern for alcoholics:*** Cooper, who had come to believe that alcoholism was a disability and a social ill of major significance, ate up the course work and became a profound believer in the transforming powers of the 12-step program. She returned to Little Rock with a heightened concern for the suffering alcoholics in her home state and the resolve to do something about it. When she arrived at the state hospital she found that many of its operations were segregated. For one thing, she was dismayed to find that there was a separate ward for white alcoholics but that black alcoholics and mental patients were thrown together. She put pressure on legislators and other officials to reorganize the state hospital so that all patients, including blacks, would get better treatment. She and Joe also set about promoting the integration of A.A. meetings and helping blacks start A.A. meetings of their own. In this she got some help from three white men — Charles Clark, who sponsored Joe for 32 years before he died in 1993, Bill White and Neil Verdock — who began a subtle collaboration aimed at turning the meeting for blacks at the state hospital into the state's first desegregated meeting. It wasn't that difficult. The three men — simply, and without fanfare — began attending the meeting for blacks. Bingo.

***Desegregation:*** Not everything went that smoothly. A group of blacks in Dumas wanted to start a meeting with the help of Clark in the local Masonic Hall, and in their efforts to assist, Cooper and McQuany, traveling in separate cars, were threatened with arrest by state troopers. Polite but determined, the two pilgrims eventually prevailed. It took courage. "I can talk, and I'm not afraid of anybody," Cooper says today, and in her full regalia, including those three inch heels, she still has the advantage, even at a very active 80 years, of being very attractive.

***The first black meeting:*** The two founded the first black meeting at Wesley Chapel across from Philander Smith college and in the mid-'60s Joe started attending some of Little Rock's white meetings. After all

these years, Cooper, who learned the 12-Steps at Joe's quiet insistence, remains a devoted supporter of A.A. which she says, "is as close to church work as you can get." Does she go to meetings? Nope, she says, "They won't let me talk." Cooper, who retired in 1987 as administrator, Division of Rehabilitation Services/Department of Human services, may have slowed a step or two, but her zeal for service remains undiminished. She serves on many boards and helps with many causes. Her latest is to help raise money to build the planned woman's treatment facility at Serenity Park. She plans to get in touch with Oprah about it. Oprah will have her hands full.

## APPENDIX II

### **Other Early Attempts to Bring Black People into A.A.**

#### **Both Successful and Unsuccessful: 1940–1948**

#### **Francis Hartigan's Account**

The following is an excerpt from Francis Hartigan, *Bill W.: A Biography*, pp. 181-182. Hartigan was secretary and confidant to Bill Wilson's wife Lois, so he was privy to a good deal of inside information about the Wilson's.<sup>156</sup>

Nothing about the issue of membership requirements was more vexing to Bill than questions about race and sexual orientation. In 1940, he invited two black men to attend AA meetings in New York City, and he found himself widely castigated for it. Many members felt that he had no right to make such a decision unilaterally. Bill was sincerely flabbergasted by

this response: it had not occurred to him that there was any decision to make. He had founded Alcoholics Anonymous for people who were alcoholic and wanted to stop drinking, and these men qualified on both counts.

When the question was put this way, even the most ardent segregationist admitted that the men had as much right as anyone to see if they might benefit from AA. Yet, there were still members who could not agree with the idea of socializing with Negroes. Bill resolved the issue with what proved to be a historic compromise: the men were allowed to attend AA meetings as “observers.” Bill urged AA groups everywhere to admit black members. If the group couldn’t do that, he urged it to “make a superhuman effort” to help the black alcoholics who came to its attention by letting them attend meetings as observers and then helping them to start their own group.

This policy did make it possible for some black alcoholics to get sober. The first black group [editor’s correction: actually the third] was started in the mid-1940s in Washington, D.C., and the group founder’s story can be found in both the second and the third editions of the Big Book under the title “Jim’s Story”....

When Bill visited Akron in 1947, he and Smithy again endorsed what they hoped would soon be AA’s universal practice regarding blacks in AA. The two cofounders made a point of visiting a black alcoholic at St. Thomas Hospital who wasn’t allowed on the alcoholic ward. In 1948, Sister Ignatia and Dr. Bob successfully petitioned the hospital to change this policy. In the last years of his life, Dr. Bob frequently attended the AA meetings of Akron’s first interracial AA group.

### **Special Composition Groups in A.A.**

The following two paragraphs are excerpted from  
barefootsworld.net, author unknown.<sup>157</sup>

The first inquiry received at G.S.O. from a “colored” alcoholic came from Pittsburgh in 1943. In reply to the next inquiry in October 1944, Bobbie B. wrote, “We do not have a colored group anywhere and the

problem is popping up more and more every day. In Pittsburgh they have a colored member, and I suggest you write and find out how the situation is handled there.” In 1945, however, there were Black groups in both Washington, D.C., and St. Louis, Missouri [editor’s note: and also Chicago]. In January of the following year, a group started in Los Angeles and within a year had 20 members. In June, the Outhwaite group in Cleveland, Ohio, registered at G.S.O. with eight members. And a month later there was news of a colored group in Charleston, South Carolina. In the same period, colored groups began in Kansas City, Missouri, and Toledo, Ohio.

By 1947, the pace picked up. A colored group began in New York’s Harlem, and two were reported in New Jersey. Philadelphia’s first negro group met for the first time at the end of June, and a group was formed in Cincinnati. The first negro group in Crowley, Louisiana, was started in May 1949. By 1952, there were about 25 known negro groups, according to Ann M., who was especially dedicated to helping A.A. reach Black alcoholics. As no effort has been made at G.S.O. to distinguish Black groups from others in the A.A. Directories, it is next to impossible to trace their growth in the intervening decades, nor to estimate the present number. They are obviously very strong in Northern Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Washington, D.C.; Atlanta, Georgia; and probably in most major cities with concentrations of Black population.

### **More on Bill Wilson’s Attempts to Bring Black Alcoholics into A.A.**

The following is excerpted from *Pass It On* pp. 316–317.<sup>158</sup>

In a 1943 letter, Bill deplored [the unwillingness of so many white A.A. members to accept black alcoholics into their fellowship] and confessed his frustration and feelings of futility about the situation:

Along with you, I feel very deeply about this race business. Save this one question, I suppose A.A. is the most

democratic society in the world. All men should have an equal opportunity to recover from alcoholism — that is the shining ideal.

But, unhappily, my own experience suggests that it may not be achieved in our lifetimes. In all the South and in most of the North, whites refuse to mingle with blacks socially. That is a stark fact which we have to face. Nor can they be coerced or persuaded to do so, even alcoholics! I know, because I once tried here in New York and got so much slapped down that I realized that no amount of insistence would do any good. It would be bound to do harm. Compared to the white alcoholics, the number of blacks is very small indeed. Suppose that some of us tried to force the situation in the South. The prejudice is so great that 50 white men might stay away from A.A. in order that we save one colored. That's the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number. It falls grievously short of our ideal — but practically speaking, what can be done about it? I don't know — I'm still looking hard for the answer.

As I long since learned that no man can dictate to an A.A. group, I tell each fellowship to abide by the wishes of the majority of its members. And if a group refuses Negroes socially, it ought to make a superhuman effort to help every single colored case to start a group of his own and permit him access to a few open meetings as an observer.

As early as 1940, Bill had drawn fire for inviting two black alcoholics to attend meetings in the New York area. After hearing him speak at an institution, they asked him whether, on their release, they might join A.A. Bill said yes, and a few weeks later, they appeared at a local meeting.

"I remember it well because I was there," Bobbie B. said. "Immediately, a reaction started up within the group. We had some Southerners with us who strongly felt that Bill had overstepped in

making this decision before consulting the group. They were ready to secede from A.A. and walk out. On the other hand, there were some Northerners who thought the Negroes should come in as full members with full privileges. And of course there were those who were on the fence.”

Bill realized immediately that he had made a mistake. “So he asked those who objected if they would agree that Negroes had the right to A.A. just the same as any other human being,” continued Bobbie. “On the basic principle, there was complete agreement. So it was more or less decided then that Negroes should be invited to attend open or closed group meetings as visitors.”





## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> As a result of our careful historical inquiries, Ernest Kurtz, Bob Pearson and I all came to the same conclusion: the first black A.A. group was the one in St. Louis, established on January 24, 1945. See Ernest Kurtz, *Not-God*, p. 361 n. 33 — “The first ‘Negro’ A.A. group was organized in St. Louis on 24 January 1945; others followed in Washington, DC, and Valdosta, GA, in September 1945 — Torrence S. (St. Louis) to Secretary, Alcoholic Foundation, 20 October 1945; Margaret B. (New York) to Torrence S., 25 October 1945.” Bob Pearson, who also had total access to the New York A.A. Archives, likewise (based on letters in the New York files) identified St. Louis as the first black Alcoholics Anonymous group, see Pearson’s *A.A. World History 1985* (unpublished draft), Chapt. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Torrence S. in a letter to the Foundation Office on October 20, 1945, as quoted in Ernest Kurtz, *Not-God*, p. 361, n. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Bob Pearson, *A.A. World History 1985* (unpublished draft), Ch. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Such as self-help groups for divorced Catholics, narcotics addicts, psychotics, gays, and lesbians — Father Dowling was not afraid of taking up what were at that time highly controversial causes. See Glenn F. Chesnut, *Father Ed Dowling: Bill Wilson’s Sponsor*, Hindsfoot Foundation (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, July 2015), chapt. 42.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> *Baltimore Afro-American*, November 27, 1956.

<sup>10</sup> Adam Arenson, “Freeing Dred Scott: St. Louis confronts an icon of slavery, 1857-2007,” *Common-Place* 8, no. 3 (April 2008), available online at [http://www.common\\_place.org/vol\\_08/no\\_03/arenson/](http://www.common_place.org/vol_08/no_03/arenson/) For the photograph of Fr. Edward Dowling and Dred Scott’s descendants, see this article or the original newspaper photo in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 10, 1957, which can be found in the *St. Louis*

*Globe-Democrat* Archives of the St. Louis Mercantile Library at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher C. Meyers, (2006). “‘Killing Them by the Wholesale’: A Lynching Rampage in South Georgia,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 90 (2): 214–235, available on JSTOR. As cited in [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valdosta,\\_Georgia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valdosta,_Georgia) (as of Apr. 12, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Bob Pearson, *A.A. World History 1985*, Ch. 5.

<sup>13</sup> As quoted in Ernest Kurtz, *Not-God*, p. 361 n. 33.

<sup>14</sup> Bill Wilson tried again to bring a black alcoholic into A.A. in New York (where he lived) in 1945, when Barry Leach (author later on of *Living Sober*) phoned him from the new A.A. clubhouse located in a church building at 405 West 41st Street on the west side of New York City (which in 1944 had replaced the old smaller A.A. clubhouse on 24th Street). Bill insisted that the black man who had just shown up at the clubhouse door had to be allowed to join their previously all-white A.A. group if he was in fact an alcoholic. But the black man disappeared shortly afterwards and was never seen again. This was not a good test case however, because the black man was an ex-convict with bleached blonde hair, wearing women’s clothes and makeup, who acknowledged that he was not only an alcoholic but also a “dope fiend.”

<sup>15</sup> See “History of the Evans Avenue Group,” a traditional document used by the group, at <http://www.evansavenuegroup.org/history> (as of April 15, 2017).

Also see the transcript (further along in this book) of the conversation at Frank Nyikos’s house, where Bill Williams (“Bill the Tailor,” who joined the Chicago black AA group in December 1945) and Jimmy Hodges (a younger major black leader in Chicago A.A.) were both in agreement that the first Chicago black AA group was founded in March 1945 by Earl Redmond. Also see AAHistoryLovers Message 5754 from Tom C., June 3, 2009, “Re: First black AA group was in Washington D.C. — or Chicago?” <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/AAHistoryLovers/conversations/messages/5754> — “According to the history of the Evans Avenue Group, which is printed every year on the program for their annual banquet, Earl Redmond did get sober in March 1945. He

lived on Evans Avenue at the time, which is where the group got its name. They started meeting on a regular basis from that time on. I have also heard that St. Louis had a black group in the mid 40's as well. The Evans Avenue group has produced many long timers. One that I know of just passed with 62 years of sobriety. The annual banquet has had featured speakers such as Bill Dotson (AA #3), Earl Treat (Founder in Chicago), Judge Touhy (Why We Were Chosen), etc.”

“The Negro in AA,” *A.A. Grapevine* (September 1951), see <http://silkworth.net/pdfhistory/Early-Member-Sep-1951.pdf> (as of June 15, 2017) says that in Chicago “the first Negro member found himself for a permanent stay in AA more than six years ago.” This means *before September 1945*, which agrees with the commonly given March 1945 date.

See also “History of the Chicago Group,” at <http://hindsfoot.org/chicago1.pdf>, by Don B., Past Delegate from Chicago Area 19: a history of Chicago area A.A. from the first group meeting on September 20, 1939 in Earl Treat’s apartment in Evanston, down to the early 1970’s. Don has a different date — March 1944 instead of March 1945 — and says “1944 was a very exciting year of growth for Alcoholics Anonymous in Chicago, beginning in March with the first meeting of the Evans Avenue Group, the first well-established and continuing black AA group in the United States.” All the other available sources however, including early member Bill Williams who joined in 1945, say that 1945 was the year the Chicago black AA group was founded.

<sup>16</sup> The History of the Evans Avenue Group can be read on the group’s website at <http://www.evansavenuegroup.org/history> (as of April 15, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Rebecca Onion, “Red Summer,” *Slate* (March 2015), at [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/history/2015/03/civil\\_rights\\_movement\\_history\\_the\\_long\\_tradition\\_of\\_black\\_americans\\_taking.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history/2015/03/civil_rights_movement_history_the_long_tradition_of_black_americans_taking.html) (as of April 2017).

<sup>18</sup> The Kilgore Rangerettes are a precision drill team and dance team from Kilgore College which performs at half time at football games and as part of similar events, made up of attractive young women wearing

cowboy hats, cowboy boots, and what were (in the old days) shockingly short skirts.

<sup>19</sup> “So You Can’t Stop Drinking? Here’s How to Get a Permanent Seat on the Wagon,” pamphlet written in 1944, goes over the twelve steps. It may be purchased from CASA (the Chicago Area Service Office/Area), at <https://www.chicagoaa.org/bookstore/c06> (as of April 22, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> The poem by Sally Jo Shelton has appeared in a number of places, including the Lord’s Grace Church Daily Devotion Guide for 2010, in the readings for July 6 and 7, see [http://totalgrowth.org/devotion/lgc\\_devotion\\_2010\\_wk27\\_eng.pdf](http://totalgrowth.org/devotion/lgc_devotion_2010_wk27_eng.pdf) (as of April 15, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> In New York City, there was a record of a black woman alcoholic named Elizabeth D. who joined in with “Felicia M.” (presumably the famous early A.A. figure Countess Felicia Gizycka Magruder) and others from the integrated Greenwich Village A.A. group in 1947 to start an A.A. group in the black community in Harlem. But there is no record anywhere indicating that Elizabeth stayed sober or continued to play any kind of role in Alcoholics Anonymous past this point. Henry L. Hudson reports that:

“By 1946, there were at least four Black members of the Greenwich Village group who were sober. There were some obvious concerns among some members of this group about the plight of alcoholics in the major Black communities of New York City. A group of these concerned members [both black and white] decided to start a group in the Black community of Harlem .... The moving force in this undertaking was Felicia M., a wealthy White female alcoholic, Mr. C, a White male alcoholic who owned a book store, Ted W., the Black alcoholic postal worker, Elizabeth D., a Black female alcoholic and John H., the Black domestic. In February of 1947, their efforts resulted in the establishment of the St. Nicholas Group of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA Fact Files 1947-1949).”

See Henry L. Hudson, B.A. and C.A.C. (Certified Addiction Counselor), Director of the Staff Counseling Unit at Montefiore Medical Center, Bronx, New York, “How and Why Alcoholics Anonymous

Works for Blacks,” in Frances Larry Brisbane and Maxine Womble, eds., *Treatment of Black Alcoholics*, published as *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, Vol. 2, Nos. 3/4 (Fall 1985 / Winter 1985-86 (New York: Haworth Press, 1985), pp. 11-30.

<sup>22</sup> The obituary given on the leaflet handed out at her funeral gives the following information: “Mrs. Jimmie Hoover, of North Birdsell Street, entered eternal peace after an extended illness, at 11:40 a.m., Saturday, August 3, 2002, in her home.

“Mrs. Hoover was born December 18, 1920, in Parkins, Arkansas, to the union of the late James and Luvenia (Huddleston) Richard. Coming from Mounds City, Illinois, she moved to South Bend, Indiana in 1927. On August 1, 1966, In South Bend, Indiana, she married William Thurman Hoover Sr., who preceded her in death on June 6, 1986.

“For many years, Mrs. Hoover was employed by Golden Age Manor Nursing Home, Mishawaka, Indiana and retired from St. Joseph’s Healthcare West as a supervisor in 1986. She was a graduate of Washington High School and a member of St. Luke Memorial Church of God in Christ. Mrs. Hoover is survived by four children; two daughters, Mrs. Gloria Lavina (Burton) Lyvers of Indianapolis, Indiana and Janice Faye Miller of South Bend, Indiana; two sons, Kenneth Raleigh (Frankie) Miller Sr. and Elder John William Miller Jr. (JuElla Smith), both of South Bend, Indiana; a step-daughter, Mattie Belle Hoover; two step-sons, Wiley (Ellen) Hoover, both of South Bend, Indiana and William Thurman (Joyce) Hoover of Niles, Michigan. A brother, Reverend Luxie D. Richard, of South Bend, Indiana. Also cherishing her precious memory are three special friends, Mrs. Minnie Clark, Mrs. Geneva Dudley and Mrs. Roberta Day; and special cousins, Mrs. Jimmie O. Hodges of Gary, Indiana and Mrs. Martha Coleman of Detroit, Michigan and a special niece, Mrs. Katherine Wilson. She is also survived by 14 grandchildren; 40 great-grandchildren; and 4 great-great-grandchildren as well as a host of nieces, nephews and other relatives and friends.

“Also preceding her in death was a sister, Mrs. Edith (Marie) Lee, four brothers, Hilton Richard Sr., John Wesley Richard, Jessie Richard and Thomas (James) Richard; a grandson, Denny Ray Miller; a great-

granddaughter, Tonya L. Griffin; and a great-niece, Mrs. Elizabeth Bonds.”

Burial in Highland Cemetery, South Bend, Indiana. Raymond Irving was one of the pallbearers.

<sup>23</sup> All excerpted material in these chapters about Jimmy Miller is from the tape recording made one afternoon in March 1993, when Jimmy Miller sat in her living room and reminisced with G.C. (who put this volume together) and Raymond Irving (who first came into the program in June 1974, and helped jog Jimmy’s memories of various people and events from early South Bend A.A.). When Raymond first came in, he had Brownie as his sponsor and then Bill Hoover, and was extremely close to Jimmy, with whom he continued to spend time regularly after Bill’s death.

<sup>24</sup> Jimmy Miller was born on December 18, 1920 in a small town in Arkansas, and died on August 3, 2002. Four of us — Raymond Irving, Frank Nyikos from Syracuse, Indiana (he and I have worked as a team on many of the archival and A.A. history projects of the past eight years), Brooklyn Bob Firth (who traveled around with Bill Hoover and Raymond Irving when he first came in, and died around a year after Jimmy did), and I — were all at her funeral. One of the last things Jimmy said was, “I’m ready to go back with the Lord.” At her request, one of the hymns sung at her funeral was “I sing because I’m happy, I sing because I’m free, his eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me.” Before her death, even though she was on oxygen, she made an appearance and spoke briefly at the Michiana Annual Conference in South Bend, which brings together A.A. people from all over the St. Joseph river valley. She wore a beautiful white suit, lovely and elegant as ever, and although she had to be carried into the building, when the time came for her to speak, she struggled to her feet and strode up to the podium without help, where she received a standing ovation, as tears filled many people’s eyes. Bill Williams from Chicago, who had helped her and Bill Hoover get the little black A.A. group going over half a century earlier, was also there and spoke. Bill Williams died on May 15, 2003, less than a year after Jimmy, and again four of us — Raymond Irving, Frank Nyikos from Syracuse, Charles B. (one of the men

Raymond sponsors), and I — drove to Chicago to pay our respects at his funeral. Their deaths marked the end of an era — a truly heroic era.

<sup>25</sup> Jimmy simply remembered that the third white man was someone named Dunbar, but no other details. This person's name remains otherwise unrecorded in the few surviving documents from that period.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew 18:19-20 said, "If two of you shall agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." The A.A. version of this principle was that if someone can get at least two people to join together in working the A.A. program, the "spirit of the tables" will be present, and the full power of divine grace will be able to flow freely as the Spirit of God makes its presence known within their hearts.

<sup>27</sup> All the excerpts in this chapter are likewise from the conversation which G.C. and Raymond I. had with Jimmy Miller in her home in March 1993.

<sup>28</sup> Raymond: "I didn't know her name, I know she kind of limp when she walks, she was kind of paralyzed."

<sup>29</sup> Out of every six hundred alcoholics in the St. Joseph river valley who have gotten sober and stayed sober, there will also be two or three who simply decided one day to stop drinking, and never drank again. Frank Nyikos (who was of so much help in putting together the material for this volume) tells me that his father did it that way. A stern warning is necessary here, however: people who keep trying to stop on their own over and over again a number of times without permanent success never make it this way. The few alcoholics who can stop drinking totally on their own, invariably make just that one single try and succeed the first time. There have also been repeated claims since the 1940's that two or three per cent of alcoholics can get sober and stay sober permanently by going to a psychiatrist or psychotherapist, but in my own researches I have been unable to find anyone at all in the St. Joseph river valley for whom that worked.

<sup>30</sup> See <http://hindsfoot.org/ndigsym.html> (as of June 18, 2017) on the A.A. meeting which Brownie started, and the Dignitaries Sympathy



groups which spread from there across the country. And we must also not forget that behind the figures of Brownie, his friend Nick Kowalski, and their disciple Red Knaak, stood the figure of Ken Merrill, the founder of A.A. in South Bend, who had played such an important role backing and supporting the city's black A.A. leaders from the beginning. We can see the influence of Ken's radio talks and writings, in which he gave his interpretation of the way the A.A. program worked, on the way Red Knaak explained the program to his Dignitaries Sympathy people — see Kenneth G. Merrill, "Drunks Are a Mess," at <http://hindsfoot.org/nsbend2.html> and the transcripts of his Christmas Eve broadcasts at <http://hindsfoot.org/nsbend1.html> and <http://hindsfoot.org/nsbend3.html> (all as of June 18, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> See "The Books the Good Old-Timers Read," in the appendix to Glenn F. Chesnut, *The St. Louis Gambler & the Railroad Man*.

<sup>32</sup> Richmond Walker, *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, first printed in 1948, and originally published and distributed by him for the Daytona Beach A.A. group under their sponsorship. The Hazelden Foundation in Minnesota took over the printing of these books at the end of 1953 when the task finally became too much for Rich to handle on his own. He had never had any association with Hazelden however, which was a brand new operation and was not even started until after he had written his book. In fact in 1953, Hazelden was nothing but a big farmhouse on a Minnesota farm (called Hazelden Farm by the farmer who originally owned it, because his wife was named Hazel) where they were trying to get a few alcoholics sober without the aid of psychiatrists or psychotherapists or hospital facilities. See the version of Richmond Walker's book currently in print, *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1954). (The first Hazelden press run was almost certainly printed and bound by the very end of 1953, even though the copyright was not registered by them until the beginning of the next year.)

<sup>33</sup> The truly good people in South Bend A.A. never paid any attention to the color of anyone's skin. Red was a white man, the founder later on of the Dignitaries Sympathy groups. These groups took the legacy of Nick Kowalski and Brownie and the spirit of St. Joe valley A.A., and

spread it into south central and southeastern Michigan (Lansing and Ann Arbor), parts of the greater Chicago area (including some of the outlying suburbs like Arlington Heights), and Bloomington in the hills of southern Indiana (where the largest Indiana University campus was located). Groups were later established even further away, in places like the New York City area and Florida. Their name originated with a comment by a janitor at the building where their first group was meeting in Lansing. The janitor jokingly referred to their rag tag band of young men as “the dignitaries.” No one is sure where the rest of the name came from, but they always explain to newcomers that they call themselves the Dignitaries Sympathy groups because “we aren’t dignitaries and we aren’t going to give you any sympathy!”

<sup>34</sup> An early version of the “List of Early A.A. Members from the Sources Used in Preparing These Two Volumes” which is given in an appendix at the end of Glenn F. Chesnut, *The St. Louis Gambler & the Railroad Man*, 2nd edit., Hindsfoot Foundation (Lincoln, Nebraska, 2005; orig. pub. 1996).

<sup>35</sup> Raymond Irving (who first came into the program in June 1974) says that when the Interracial Group started up again around 1975, it first met at “the church, First Presbyterian Church there on Colfax [333 W. Colfax Avenue], right next to the Morningside Hotel.” Bob Firth (“Brooklyn Bob”), an Irishman from Brooklyn and New York City, who also first became associated with A.A. in South Bend in June 1974 and went to a lot of meetings with Bill Hoover and Raymond, says that Raymond’s memory is basically correct here, that the Interracial Group first met in that area of town, but that it was not at the church but at the mental health affairs office situated in a converted private dwelling on Colfax Avenue about three houses west of Williams Street (on the north side). Brooklyn Bob had a good deal of trouble with the program at first, and although he kept on going to meetings, he could not stay sober and continually flaunted his drinking and his hostility. Bill Hoover finally called him aside and had a long and stern talk with him: he was deliberately attempting to make a mockery of the program by his behavior, and if he did not start taking the program seriously, he was going to die. That little heartfelt talk, and a profound spiritual experience

which Brooklyn Bob had kneeling on his knees in a grassy field, turned him around and got him sober. And what marvelous fruit that then bore! At Bob's funeral a quarter of a century later, literally hundreds of A.A. people came bearing witness to how much he had helped them with his simple wisdom of the spirit, his devotion to the program, and his extraordinary love and compassion.

<sup>36</sup> All the excerpts in this chapter are again from the conversation which G.C. and Raymond Irving had with Jimmy Miller in her home in March 1993.

<sup>37</sup> Ken M.'s daughter Martha P., telephone conversation with G.C., Spring 1993.

<sup>38</sup> The roots of the distorted thinking patterns which lead to most forms of alcoholism are established somewhere during childhood or early adolescence. Some of the basic fears and anxieties may have arisen as early as the pre-Freudian period when we were still breast-feeding (let's face it, the bottle with the magic liquid which removes all our unhappiness and puts us into total bliss when we suck on it is a breast substitute). These patterns also may not have arisen until later on, perhaps even as late as the age of sixteen or so. But they are pre-adult issues. The "adult" part of alcoholics' minds can frequently function quite well, but since the foundations of their alcoholic obsession do not lie in their adult intellectual and rational processes, they will never be able to stop drinking by playing with big words and logic-chopping and intellectual analysis of their problems. As a basic rule of thumb, an explanation which could not be understood by a twelve-year-old child will not "speak" intelligibly to the parts of the alcoholic mind which need healing. That twelve year old part of their minds (or eight year old or whatever) literally cannot understand the fancy intellectual explanations.

<sup>39</sup> When A.A. first began in the late 1930's, newcomers regularly did a sort of fourth and fifth step within a few days of coming into the program. It cannot have been more than a relatively trivial look at themselves at that stage, but it is doubtful that anyone realized this at that time. It is important to remember that when they began writing the Big Book in May 1938, even Bill W. himself had only been sober for three and a half years, and most of the membership had only been sober for a

year or two. All the basic things were in place of course by the time they started writing the Big Book, but there were dimensions to the program which were only going to appear after there were people who had spent many years living and working the steps. Most of the people who came into A.A. at the beginning, but who ended up staying sober for years and years (till the ends of their lives), clearly did a much deeper kind of fourth step inventory at a later period. One can tell this by listening to the way they told the story of their lives later on, and observing how they had learned to interact so much more smoothly with other people. So the A.A. sponsors in the St. Joseph river valley who have twelve, fifteen, and twenty or more years of experience in the program, and who demonstrably are highly effective at working with newcomers, usually advise people to wait at least a year after coming into the program before attempting a real fourth step inventory in great depth. Pete Abbott said that he had seen newcomers who tried to take their fourth step sooner than that, who went back out because of the intense pressure of having to look at themselves so thoroughly. G.C. (who appears in this chapter) did his fourth step after only seven months in the program, but he had a good deal of prior knowledge and training in spirituality, and was also under constant expert supervision while he was doing this: Submarine Bill was there at all times, and Larry W. (an A.A. old-timer who was one of the three best psychotherapists in the St. Joseph river valley) was keeping tabs on G.C. in the background and was ready to jump in at any point where he showed any signs of getting into any kind of psychological difficulties that could push him over the edge. We should never forget the first rule of the Hippocratic Oath, *primum non nocere*, a principle which should be followed by all good healers: "First, do no harm."

<sup>40</sup> All the excerpts in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, are from the conversation which G.C. and Raymond Irving had with Jimmy Miller at her home in March 1993.

<sup>41</sup> See for example C. G. Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960; orig. pub. in 1952). Jung believed that life was not a meaningless series of random events, but an expression of what he and Wolfgang Pauli referred to as *unus mundus*, the "one world" which underlies everything

else which exists. (Wolfgang Pauli was a famous physicist who helped develop quantum mechanics.)

<sup>42</sup> *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1953), pp. 48-49: “Pride heads the procession” of the Seven Deadly Sins, “always spurred by conscious or unconscious fears.” See also *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 3rd ed., p. 67: fear “was an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it.”

<sup>43</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:7, which says in the original Greek, *echomen de ton thesauron touton en ostrakinois skeuesin, hina hē hyperbolē tēs dynamēôs ēi tou Theou kai mē ex hēmōn*. This is the conclusion to an extended passage (3:17-4:7, all of which is worth reading) in the Apostle Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. The light has shone out of the darkness, the Apostle Paul said — “coming down from the Father of Lights” as the Apostle James put it in James 1:17 — and has entered our hearts so that we now bear within ourselves just a tiny bit of “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.” And that holy light begins to heal and repair our minds and spirits so that the image of God within our souls starts to be restored to that original splendor in which we human beings were created at the beginning of all things. Paul himself was saved when he saw that holy image of God shining out in the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth. All human beings bear within themselves the image of God, but the problem is that it is all too often almost totally obscured under filth and rubbish. But any human being who accepts the divine healing and grace can restore that holy image enough to reflect (just like a little mirror) some of the rays of the Eternal and Uncreated Light. Certainly not as well as Jesus did! I am not Jesus or Napoleon (nor do I have space aliens from the planet Mongo who have taken over my brain). We are not talking about that kind of insanity. I hope that you the reader do not believe that you are Jesus either. Or Moses or Buddha, for that matter. Nevertheless, the minute my lost soul sees a single tiny ray of that divine light reflected anywhere at all on this earth, even in the hearts of perfectly ordinary human beings like Bill Williams the Tailor or Brownie (who were also certainly not Jesus Christ come back to earth) I am not helplessly lost any longer. I can see that there is

hope, and I can start figuring out how to climb out of the bitter darkness where I laid myself down and cried out in total agony and despair.

<sup>44</sup> *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1976), p. 83.

<sup>45</sup> See Obituary of James W. Hodges (September 23, 1919 - February 9, 2012) at [http://www.aarayner.com/fh/obituaries/obituary.cfm?o\\_id=1413576&fh\\_id=12905](http://www.aarayner.com/fh/obituaries/obituary.cfm?o_id=1413576&fh_id=12905). The paragraphs below are all quoted verbatim from this obituary:

“James W. Hodges (Jimmy); born in Shelby, Mississippi, September 23, 1919 to the union of ~ Joseph W. Hodges and Edna Johnson-Hodges (whom preceded him in death). Joseph W. Hodges was a phenomenal tailor by trade, and Edna Johnson-Hodges was an excellent seamstress. Jimmy was their only child. After the death of his father Joseph W. Hodges, Edna Johnson-Hodges moved to Chicago when Jimmy was 9 years old. As a single mom Edna provided for them by landing a job at Marshall Field’s & Company (first African American employee) as the head seamstress.

“While at Tuskegee High School and Tuskegee Institute Jimmy was on the Wrestling Team, played baseball and football (Quarterback); it was then he acquired the name ‘Moon Doggie’ due to his unique baseball Style.

“On January 7, 1943, he joined the United States Army. His tour of duty was in Alexandria, Louisiana (guarding the German Prisoners). Jimmy often spoke candidly about the racism in the military during that time. Initially, Jimmy was called for duty with the Tuskegee Airman, he was friends with Chappy James, due to his fear of flying he declined the position.

“In 1945, Jimmy was hired at the Main United States Post Office in Chicago, Illinois. He was fired for disorderly conduct, but eventually re-hired in 1949 as a Mail Handler. April 4, 1959, Jimmy became a member of the largest 12-step group. Later Jimmy began facilitating meetings in a small room permitted by the Post Office. The meetings consisted of three people; Jimmy and two other guys. In 1969, Jimmy was promoted to P.A.R. (Program for Alcoholic Recovery) as a P.A.R. Counselor where he

counseled hundreds of people. Jimmy held this position for 7 years. Eventually he was further promoted to the position as a P.A.R. Coordinator in 1976 at South Suburban Illinois Post Office, this enabled him to help even more people. In 1985, Jimmy retired from the United States South Suburban Post Office, serving a total of 36 years.

“Jimmy continued to work with alcoholics and people with addictions diligently; he made this a lifelong commitment, in addition to he spoke for various groups all over the United States, including several International Conventions. Everywhere Jimmy went people would stop him and tell him how much he has helped them in terms of their addiction, but Jimmy would always reply by saying “Thank you for helping a monkey like me who stumbled and fumbled and quivered and shivered into these rooms” and almost every time someone would complement him he would smile and say “I’m a tell them what you said.” Jimmy looked forward to all of the spiritual functions, especially the annual Men’s Retreat held in June.

“He leaves behind two daughters, Toi Overton and Pepper Overton-Blackmon; one son-in-law, Charles Blackmon; one step daughter, Yvonne Jackson; seven grandchildren, Yvette Brown, Tammy Hardy, Shelli Bussell (1 grandson) Danny O’Connor II, (The Rebel), Celestine (Cupid) Sanders, Valencia Blackmon (Orange Juice), and a host of other relatives and friends.

“We love and miss ‘The Tramp from the Scamp Camp.’ A special Thanks to Evans Avenue Group, Mustard Seed, and Jesse Brown VA Medical Center.”

<sup>46</sup> An obituary in a newspaper clipping (probably from the South Bend *Tribune*): “Harold ‘Brownie’ Brown, 69, of 734 N. Hill, St., died at 9:56 a.m. Wednesday in Memorial Hospital after an illness of several months. He was retired from White Farm Equipment Co. Born on July 5, 1914, in St. Louis, Mo., he came to this area in 1947 from St. Louis. In September 1938, in St. Louis, he married Evelyn Rodgers. She survives with a son, Donald of St. Louis; a daughter, Andromeda, of St. Louis; four grandchildren; a great-grandchild; three sisters, Mrs. Willie Lee Demery, Mrs. Bessie Coleman, and Mrs. Gertrude Dickson, all of St. Louis; and four brothers, Daniel, and Nathaniel of South Bend and Able and Albert

of St Louis. Services will be at 1 p.m. Monday in St. Paul Bethel Missionary Baptist Church with Rev. Booker West, pastor, officiating. Friends may call from 2 to 4 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m. Sunday at Clark's Funeral Chapel. Burial will be in Chapel Hill Memorial Gardens, Osceola. He was a member of the church and of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). He was also founder of the local AA's Friendship Group."

The obituary on his funeral program: "Mr. Harold 'Brownie' Brown, 69, of 734 N. Hill St. South Bend, Indiana, expired Wed., Nov. 23, 1983 at 9:56 A.M. in Memorial Hospital. He was born July 5, 1914 in St. Louis, Mo., to Will and Lemora Brown. In Sept. of 1938 in St. Louis, he married Evelyn Rodgers who survives. Along with his wife, he is survived by, one son, Mr. Donald Brown, one daughter, Miss Andromeda Brown both of St. Louis, three sisters, Mrs. Willie Lee Demery, Mrs. Bessie Coleman, and Mrs. Gertrude Dickson all of St. Louis, four brothers, Daniel, Nathaniel, Able, and Albert Brown also of St. Louis, four grandchildren, one great-granddaughter, and a host of nieces and nephews. Mr. Brown lived in South Bend thirty-six years, coming from St. Louis. He retired from white Farm Equipment Company. At the time of his death, he was a member of St. Paul Bethel Baptist Church, where he was a Trustee and served on the Usher Board. He has also been an active member of Alcohol Anonymous for thirty-three years. He founded the 'Friendship Group' in 1970, and was dedicated to the spiritual welfare and growth of the group."

HONORARY PALLBEARERS listed on the funeral program: Ezell Agnew, Robert Jackson, Nick Kowalski, Steve Rickey, Earl Jones, Wayne Knaak, Lester Smith, and Albert Summerlin.

Two of them, Ezell Agnew and Lester Smith, were black alcoholics who came into South Bend A.A. in 1950, the same year as Brownie — see Glenn F. Chesnut, *The Factory Owner & the Convict*, 2nd edit., Hindsfoot Foundation (Lincoln, Nebraska: iUniverse, 2005; orig. pub. 1996), p. 262.

Two of the other pallbearers on this list were white alcoholics: Wayne "Red" Knaak was the founder of the DIGNITARIES SYMPATHY A.A. GROUPS which are now spread across the whole United States, from coast to coast. Nick Kowalski originally got sober in the Michigan City



state penitentiary (Michigan City was another city located on the South Shore line). This penitentiary was the site of one of two most famous early A.A. prison groups (see *The Factory Owner & the Convict*). Red Knaak regarded Brownie and Nick Kowalski as his sponsors, and the Dignitaries Sympathy groups still honor all three men, including annual pilgrimages to the A.A. meeting place in South Bend which Brownie founded.

<sup>47</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all the extended quotations in this first chapter and also the two following chapters are taken from that tape recording, made when Harold “Brownie” Brown was giving a lead in around 1972. All of this material first appeared as Chapters 1– 3 of Glenn F. Chesnut, *The St. Louis Gambler & the Railroad Man: Lives and Teachings of the A.A. Old Timers* (2005).

<sup>48</sup> See Ken M.’s Christmas message over radio station WSBT in 1944, in Glenn F. Chesnut, *The Factory Owner and the Convict*, ch. 12, “Ken and Soo Start Their A.A. Group.”

<sup>49</sup> As of 2015, according to U.S. government statistics from the National Institutes of Health, 26.9% of people ages 18 or older had done some binge drinking in the past month; 7.0% reported that they had been involved in heavy alcohol use in the past month. 15.1 million adults ages 18 and older (6.2% of this age group) were diagnosed as having Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD). See <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/overview-alcohol-consumption/alcohol-facts-and-statistics> (as of June 20, 2017).

<sup>50</sup> Mrs. Marty Mann, the founder in 1944 of the National Council on Alcoholism, who had been one of the faculty at the Yale School of Alcohol Studies, and was very close to two of the leading researchers on alcoholism, Dr. E. M. Jellinek and Dr. Harry M. Tiebout, was still making a similar kind of distinction between “heavy drinkers” and true “alcoholics” throughout the 1950’s. Even in the kind of extremely high social circles in which Marty moved, up at the very top of American and English society, the kind of out-of-control drunkenness which Brownie was displaying by that point in his life, was very common and was not regarded as alcoholism. See Marty Mann, *Marty Mann’s New Primer on Alcoholism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, orig. pub. 1950,

rev. ed. 1958). See also Sally Brown and David R. Brown, *A Biography of Mrs. Marty Mann: The First Lady of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 2001), pp. 157, 164, and 213.

<sup>51</sup> William E. Swegan and Louis Jolyon West, M.D., began devising the Lackland Model of alcoholism treatment in 1953 in San Antonio, Texas. It combined good psychiatry with heavy A.A. involvement in the actual treatment, and is one of the three basic models of successful alcoholism treatment, achieving a fully documented fifty per cent success rate the first time patients went through the program. See William E. Swegan with Glenn F. Chesnut, Ph.D., *The Psychology of Alcoholism*, Hindsfoot Foundation (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2011; orig. pub. in 2003 as *On the Military Firing Line in the Alcoholism Treatment Program*), p. 282. The other two highly successful systems have been the Minnesota Model and the kind of heavily spiritually-based program which Sister Ignatia carried out so successfully at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron (which also, like the Lackland Model, involved the continuous direct involvement of A.A. people).

<sup>52</sup> From the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1976), the paragraph that starts at the bottom of page 83.

<sup>53</sup> Matthew 23:4 and Luke 11:46.

<sup>54</sup> “Negroes Leave South Bend in Fear of Klan,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (12 September 1923). “Klan and Foes Fight in Indiana,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (20 May 1924).

<sup>55</sup> “Hampton Kayos Jim Crow at South Bend Dance Date,” *Pittsburgh Courier* (12 March 1949).

<sup>56</sup> When describing Satan, the ancient Greek texts speak of *ho philoponêros daimôn* (the demon who loves evil), who is filled with *ho misokalos phthonos* (the envy which hates the good and beautiful). Glenn F. Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Evagrius*, 2nd ed. (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), Chapter 5, “Eusebius: The Rational and the Irrational in Human Motivation,” pp. 97-110 and especially p. 106.

<sup>57</sup> For more on this concept, see Glenn F. Chesnut, *Father Ralph Pfau and the Golden Books: The Path to Recovery from Alcoholism and Drug Addiction*, Hindsfoot Foundation (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2017), chapters 11-13. Father Pfau, one of the four most-published early A.A. authors, began coming out with his series of “Golden Books” in Indianapolis, Indiana in 1947, the year Brownie came to South Bend.

<sup>58</sup> From the tape recording of the lead given by Nick Kowalski at Ann Arbor, Michigan on February 26, 1976. For Nick’s story, see Glenn F. Chesnut, *The Factory Owner & the Convict*, chapters 9-11 and 14-16.

<sup>59</sup> Called the Dignitaries Sympathy Group because a janitor at the first place they met in Lansing used to refer to them (most of them young men who had hit a very low bottom) in joking fashion as “those dignitaries,” and because (as the group tells newcomers while laughing heartily, “We won’t give you any sympathy.” Wayne Knaak was listed as one of the honorary pallbearers on the leaflet which was handed out at Brownie’s funeral, copies of which still survive. The person who continued carrying on Brownie’s work in South Bend (and keeping Brownie’s meetings at 616 Pierce Street going) was Raymond Irving, who came into the program in 1974, and had first Brownie and then Bill Hoover as his sponsor.

<sup>60</sup> All of Goshen Bill’s words as quoted in this chapter come from his 1981 lead in Elkhart, Indiana, for the Twelve Golden Steps Group which met at Life House alcoholism treatment center. Life House was at that time a small operation (also known as “Booze Driers”) which was set up in an old house in a residential neighborhood in Elkhart. It is now a model treatment facility called Life Treatment Center housed in the former Broadway Hotel on South Michigan Street in South Bend.

<sup>61</sup> With the earthy quality of some of Martin Luther’s sermons (and an echo of the doctrine of the atonement in Luther’s famous 1520 treatise *On the Liberty of a Christian*), Goshen Bill talked about the incarnation and the atonement: “Say, ‘if you make me your sin,’ Christ say, ‘if you sin, I’ll redeem you.’ So that was Christ’s job, to come down. He *owned* the world, and the Godhead didn’t have a place to be born. Had to go over there in the cow pen — if God been one of us, we’d have throwed

everybody out of that hole — this is *my* damn place, you can't kick me out of here! [*Laughter*]"

<sup>62</sup>When he gave the lead in 1981 which was tape recorded, he said that he had been sober seventeen years.

<sup>63</sup>As in passages like Paul's statement of the basic gospel message in Romans 3:28, "a human being is justified [that is, can 'justify' his or her behavior, be put in the 'right' relationship with God] by *pistis* without need of works of the law."

<sup>64</sup>All excerpts in this chapter are taken from the tape recording of the lead given in 1981 by Goshen Bill (William Henry Caldwell) at Life House in Elkhart, Indiana (see note 51). The citation from the Big Book can be found in *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 3rd. ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1976), p. 58.

<sup>65</sup>Larry W. knew and had extraordinary respect for Goshen Bill. At one point during the period when he was first getting sober, Larry lived in Adrian, Michigan, which is only twenty-five miles from Toledo. He had been compelled to quit drinking because he had been told by a judge that he was going to be sent to Jackson prison for twenty years if he did not, and told by a doctor that he was going to die of advanced liver failure if he did not. Ernie Gerig, one of the original people who got sober in the early Akron A.A. group, was one of Larry's sponsors at that time. Ernie worked with more than one young man during that general period, see page 258 of *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers: A Biography, with Recollections of Early A.A. in the Midwest* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1980) for a reference to one of them (although this particular young man could not have been Larry, he told me, because of the date given). During the years which followed, after Larry had gone to graduate school and earned a degree in counseling, Submarine Bill C. and Brooklyn Bob Firth brought him to South Bend, Indiana, to work with alcoholics there. Larry was the one who later brought Glenn C. (the author of this book) into the program. He sent Glenn to meet Raymond Irving (who became one of his major spiritual guides), but arranged for Submarine Bill to actually serve as Glenn's sponsor during those first years. Larry himself also remained in regular contact with Glenn through the Tuesday night meeting in Osceola,

Indiana, which Larry, Glenn, Submarine Bill, and Brooklyn Bob Firth all attended. Bob was Bill's sponsor.

<sup>66</sup>*Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, compiled and published in 1948 by Richmond Walker, under the sponsorship of the A.A. group at Daytona Beach, Florida. Rich was born on August 2, 1892, got sober in Boston in May 1942 (right after the new Boston A.A. group had separated from the Jacoby Club), and died on March 25, 1965 after many years of devoted service to the A.A. program. The meditations at the bottom of each day's reading were adapted in part from an Oxford Group book: *God Calling*, by Two Listeners, ed. A. J. Russell (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co.), which is still one of the four or five bestsellers at religious bookstores in the United States. It is not just alcoholics who have appreciated the spiritual depth and power of those two women who taught us so much about how to enter God's presence. Since 1953, *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* has been kept in print by the Hazelden Foundation in Center City, Minnesota (the first Hazelden press run was almost certainly printed and bound by the end of 1953 — there is a copy with an inscription written on it dated January 1, 1954 — although Hazelden apparently did not register the copyright until the beginning of 1954).

<sup>67</sup> Brownie made this passage in the reading for October 11 in *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* the centerpiece for example (see chapt. 14 of this volume) in a talk he gave attacking racial discrimination in Gary, Indiana.

<sup>68</sup>All excerpts are again from the lead given in 1981 by Goshen Bill (William Henry Caldwell) at the Twelve Golden Steps Group at Life House in Elkhart, Indiana.

<sup>69</sup>*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1976), pp. 83-4. The Twelve Promises: "We should be sensible, tactful, considerate and humble without being servile or scraping. As God's people we stand on our feet; we don't crawl before anyone. If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. [1] We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. [2] We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. [3] We will comprehend the word serenity [4] and we will know peace. [5] No matter how far down the

scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. [6] That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. [7] We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. [8] Self-seeking will slip away. [9] Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. [10] Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. [11] We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. [12] We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us — sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.”

<sup>70</sup> The famous theologian Paul Tillich (who taught at Union Theological Seminary along with Reinhold Niebuhr, the author of the Serenity Prayer), wrote a book called *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University, 1952) in which he spoke of three fundamental varieties of existential anxiety: ontological (*the anxiety of fate and death*), spiritual (*the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness*), and moral (*the anxiety of guilt and condemnation*). The anxiety of rejection and abandonment is one way in which that last variety of existential anxiety may appear.

<sup>71</sup> The April 1945 date comes from Bob Pearson, *A.A. World History 1985* (unpublished draft), page 44, the only unambiguous early source I have found for the date of founding of the Washington D.C. group. This date presumably came from the New York A.A. headquarters files, to which Pearson had total access: “The Washington Colored Group was founded in April ’45 by Jimmy S. It later changed its name to the Cosmopolitan Group to convey the fact that it was ‘a group for all people, all races; it doesn’t matter who you are.’” But Ernest Kurtz, who had the same full access to the New York Archives, seems to date the founding of the Washington D.C. group (along with another black group formed at the same time in Valdosta, Georgia) to *September* of that year instead of April, although his sentence is ambiguously phrased — he may have intended the September 1945 date to refer only to the Valdosta group. See Ernest Kurtz, *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*. Expanded edition. (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1991; orig. pub. 1979), p. 361 n. 33 — “The first ‘Negro’ A.A. group was organized in St. Louis on 24 January 1945; others followed in Washington, DC, and

Valdosta, GA, in September 1945 — Torrence S. (St. Louis) to Secretary, Alcoholic Foundation, 20 October 1945; Margaret B. (New York) to Torrence S., 25 October 1945.”

<sup>72</sup> “Jim’s Story,” *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1955) pp. 471-484. Also in the 3rd ed., which was pub. in 1976, in pp. 483ff.; and in the 4th ed., which was pub. in 2001, in pp. 232ff. See also “Jim’s Story: Jim Scott, M.D.” in Nancy Olson’s *Biographies of the Authors of the Stories in the Big Book*, which gives a series of short biographies of all the A.A. members who wrote the stories in the back of the Big Book; Nancy’s account can be read at [http://www.a-lassociates.com/westbalto/HISTORY\\_PAGE/Authors.htm](http://www.a-lassociates.com/westbalto/HISTORY_PAGE/Authors.htm) (as of Feb. 13, 2016). See also Henry L. Hudson, B.A., Certified Addiction Counselor (Director of the Staff Counseling Unit at Montefiore Medical Center, Bronx, New York), “How and Why Alcoholics Anonymous Works for Blacks,” in Frances Larry Brisbane and Maxine Womble, eds., *Treatment of Black Alcoholics*, published as *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, Vol. 2, Nos. 3/4 (Fall 1985/Winter 1985-86 (New York: Haworth Press, 1985), pp. 11-30.

<sup>73</sup> “Jim’s Story,” *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1955) pp. 471-484.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> “Jim’s Story,” from kochbrian2249, AAHL message 9726, Jan. 2, 2014 (as of May 26, 2017). Find A Grave for Dr. James C. Scott, Jr., at <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=31077007> (as of May 26, 2017) and Find A Grave for Viola M. Scott, at <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=31076958> (as of May 26, 2017).

<sup>76</sup> *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1953).

<sup>77</sup> Glenn F. Chesnut, *Father Ed Dowling: Bill Wilson’s Sponsor*, Hindsfoot Foundation (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2015), see the section on “The A.A. Bill of Rights” in Chapt. 30, “Ratifying of the Twelve Traditions and Dr. Bob’s Death: 1950.”

<sup>78</sup> Nancy Olson, “The Second A.A. International Convention: St. Louis, Mo, 1955” at <http://www.barefootsworld.net/aa2ndintl1955.html> (as of May 27, 2017) and Arthur S. (Arlington, Texas), *A Narrative Timeline of AA History*, either at <http://hindsfoot.org/aatimeline.pdf> or at <http://www.williamwhitepapers.com/pr/2014%20Narrative%20Timeline%20of%20AA%20History.pdf> (as of May 27, 2017).

<sup>79</sup> *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1957), p. 37.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> “Jim’s Story,” from kochbrian2249, AAHL message 9726, Jan. 2, 2014 (as of May 26, 2017).

<sup>82</sup> Cindy M. (Philadelphia), “Re: First black AA group in Washington D.C. — or Chicago?” AAHistoryLovers message 5753, June 5, 2009, see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/5753> (as of May 24, 2017).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Henry L. Hudson, B.A. and C.A.C. (Certified Addiction Counselor), Director of the Staff Counseling Unit at Montefiore Medical Center, Bronx, New York, “How and Why Alcoholics Anonymous Works for Blacks,” in Frances Larry Brisbane and Maxine Womble, eds., *Treatment of Black Alcoholics*, published as *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, Vol. 2, Nos. 3/4 (Fall 1985/Winter 1985-86 (New York: Haworth Press, 1985), pp. 11-30.

<sup>85</sup> Big Book 4th ed., pp. 232 and 244.

<sup>86</sup> *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1957), p. 37.

<sup>87</sup> The full text of the “History of the Cosmopolitan Club” is given in Cindy M. (Philadelphia), “Re: First black AA group in Washington D.C. — or Chicago?” AAHistoryLovers message 5753, June 5, 2009, see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/5753> (as of May 24, 2017).



<sup>88</sup> Glenn F. Chesnut, *Father Ralph Pfau and the Golden Books: The Path to Recovery from Alcoholism and Drug Addiction*, Hindsfoot Foundation (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2017).

<sup>89</sup> Glenn F. Chesnut, "Richmond Walker and the Twenty-Four Hour Book," <http://hindsfoot.org/rwfla1.html> (as of May 30, 2017).

<sup>90</sup> The fullest account of the position taken by this side was written by the psychiatric social worker William E. Swegan in his book *The Psychology of Alcoholism*, Hindsfoot Foundation (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2011, re-issued in that year after Swegan's death at the age of ninety with sixty years of sobriety in A.A.). "Sergeant Bill" got sober on Long Island in 1948, and was a protégé of Mrs. Marty Mann; he used her connections to get him put in charge of the first officially sanctioned military alcoholism treatment programs, on Long Island (close to New York City) and then (in the early 1950's) at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.

<sup>91</sup> "Jim's Story," *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1955) pp. 471-484.

<sup>92</sup> The text of Dr. Scott's talk is given in Chapter 22 of this book.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> "Jim's Story," *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1955) pp. 471-484.

<sup>95</sup> Find A Grave, Joseph Daniel McQuany," birth and death dates Nov. 16, 1928 (Kentucky) – Oct. 25, 2007 (Arkansas), go to <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=24058625> (as of Dec. 2, 2015). An editorial tribute to Joe McQuany in the state-wide newspaper, the Arkansas Democrat Gazette, November 2, 2007, gives the same years for birth and death: Joseph Daniel McQuany, 1928-2007.

<sup>96</sup> Obituary in AAHistory.com, go to <http://www.aahistory.com/charliep/sign.php> (as of Dec. 2, 2015). Rob Fuhrman in the AAHistoryLovers, message no. 7325, see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/7325> (as of Dec. 2, 2015) says of Charlie's death, "Had a heart attack on the way home from

a meeting. Carried the message all the way to the end of his life. True love and service.”

<sup>97</sup> Bob Pearson, *A.A. World History 1985* (unpublished draft), pp. 171-173 and 597, credits Joe McQuany with being the first black man in Arkansas, and says he was one of the first black people to join A.A. in the Southwest. Pearson (on pp. 168-171) gives a lengthy account of how the first A.A. group in Little Rock was formed, and dates its beginning to late May 1940. But John Barton, in AAHistoryLovers message no. 5863, says that the Little Rock group, the sixteenth A.A. group formed, was in fact started slightly earlier, on April 19, 1940, see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/5863> (as of Dec. 2, 2015).

<sup>98</sup> For more details about the events described in this and the preceding six paragraphs, see for example: “Civil Rights: The Little Rock School Integration Crisis,” on the website maintained by the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, Kansas, see [http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online\\_documents/civil\\_rights\\_little\\_rock.html](http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/civil_rights_little_rock.html) (as of Dec. 3, 2015). “Integration of Central High School,” on the History.com website at <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/central-high-school-integration> (as of Dec. 3, 2015). “Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle,” on the Stanford University website, see [http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc\\_little\\_rock\\_school\\_desegregation\\_1957/](http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_little_rock_school_desegregation_1957/) (as of Dec. 3, 2015).

<sup>99</sup> “Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)” from the Mayo Clinic website, see <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/basics/symptoms/con-20022540> (as Dec. 4, 2015).

<sup>100</sup> Also the cucumber and green-tinted cream cheese tea sandwiches called Benedictine sandwiches (invented by Jennie C. Benedict in the 1890’s) and bourbon-laced Derby Pie with walnuts and chocolate chips in the filling.

<sup>101</sup> See his obituary in Find A Grave, “Joseph Daniel McQuany,” go to <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=24058625> (as of Dec. 2, 2015).

<sup>102</sup> Bob Pearson, *A.A. World History 1985* (unpublished draft), pp. 171-173. *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, November 2, 2007, editorial tribute to Joe McQ[uany]. Cliff Bishop, AAHistoryLovers message no. 4668, “Re: Who was Joe McQ’s sponsor?” see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/4668> (as of Dec. 6, 2015).

<sup>103</sup> Bob Pearson, *A.A. World History 1985* (unpublished draft), pp. 171-173. Chris Budnick, “RE: Who was Joe McQ’s sponsor?” AAHistoryLovers message no. 4669 (Oct. 31, 2007), see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/4669> (as of Dec. 6, 2015). Sherry Hartsell, AAHistoryLovers message no. 4669 (Oct. 31, 2007), see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/4669> (as of Dec. 6, 2015). Cliff Bishop, AAHistoryLovers message no. 4668, “Re: Who was Joe McQ’s sponsor?” see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/4668> (as of Dec. 6, 2015).

<sup>104</sup> Joe McQuany and Charlie Parmley, *Joe & Charlie Tapes*, as recorded in Mesa, Arizona, February 6-8, 1987, from the transcript made by A.A. GSO Watch, available at <http://www.silkworth.net/gsowatch/jc/> (as of Jan. 11, 2016), see also <http://gsowatch.aamo.info/>, Tape 1, Side A, p. 3: “Through God’s grace and because of this program working each day of my life, I haven’t found it necessary to take a drink of alcohol since March the tenth of 1962, and for this I’m grateful.”

<sup>105</sup> Cliff B. — Sponsee of Joe McQuany — of the Joe & Charlie Big Book Study Workshops at Fort Worth, Texas on Feb. 2007. See Recommended A.A. Speakers (London, Ontario) at <http://www.aalondon.org/speakers.html> and click on the link to Cliff B.’s talk, which will take you to <http://www.mediafire.com/download/mbfdi4zf44b6vq9/Cliff+Bishop%2C+Ft.Worth+%2CTexas%2C++Feb.+2007.mp3> (as of June 1, 2017).

<sup>106</sup> Cliff Bishop, AAHistoryLovers message no. 4668, “Re: Who was Joe McQ’s sponsor?” see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/4668> (as of Dec. 6, 2015). Also see Jodi Sh. Doff, “Joe & Charlie: The Other Two Old Drunks,” *The Fix: Addiction and Recovery*, July 15, 2015.

<sup>107</sup> David Palmer, “The Joe [McQ] and Theodosia story: Battling alcohol on the frontiers,” *One Day at a Time*, Vol. 2, No. 2, June 2005. Reprinted in AAHistoryLovers message no. 4759, see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/4759> (as of Dec. 19, 2015).

<sup>108</sup> Cliff Bishop, AAHistoryLovers message no. 4668, “Re: Who was Joe McQ’s sponsor?” see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/4668> (as of Dec. 6, 2015).

<sup>109</sup> Jodi Sh. Doff, “Joe & Charlie: The Other Two Old Drunks,” *The Fix: Addiction and Recovery*, July 15, 2015. Cliff Bishop, AAHistoryLovers message no. 4668, “Re: Who was Joe McQ’s sponsor?” see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/4668> (as of Dec. 6, 2015). Bob Pearson, *A.A. World History 1985* (unpublished draft).

<sup>110</sup> Bob Pearson, *A.A. World History 1985* (unpublished draft), pp. 171-173. One correction to his account: Joe McQuany’s wife’s name was Loubelle, not LuAnn, see the newspaper obituary for Joseph Daniel McQuany in Find a Grave at <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=24058625> (as of Jan. 4, 2016).

<sup>111</sup> A very perceptive observation made in a somewhat surprising place, in the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, November 2, 2007, in a editorial tribute to Joe McQuany.

<sup>112</sup> Jodi Sh. Doff, “Joe & Charlie: The Other Two Old Drunks,” *The Fix: Addiction and Recovery*, July 15, 2015.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> See Appendix I for more about Theodosia Cooper.

<sup>115</sup> David Palmer, “The Joe [McQuany] and Theodosia story: Battling alcohol on the frontiers,” *One Day at a Time*, Vol. 2, No. 2, June

2005. Reprinted in AAHistoryLovers message no. 4759, see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/4759> (as of Dec. 19, 2015).

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Joe McQ[uany], *The Steps We Took* (Little Rock, Arkansas: August House, 1990), 175-6.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Jodi Sh. Doff, “Joe & Charlie: The Other Two Old Drunks,” *The Fix: Addiction and Recovery, Straight Up*, July 15, 2015. See <https://www.thefix.com/content/joe-charlie-other-two-old-drunks> (as of Jan. 21, 2016). See also “Recovery Dynamics and Joe McQ.,” on the Serenity Recovery Centers website at (<http://www.serenityrecovery.org/recovery-dynamics-and-joe-mcq/>) (as of Jan. 20, 2016). Also see the editorial tribute to Joe McQ. in the state-wide newspaper, the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, November 2, 2007 — the first part of which is given in his Find A Grave entry: Joseph Daniel McQuany, Find A Grave, at <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=24058625> (as of Dec. 28, 2015) — where it notes that Joe McQuany “called his program Serenity House before it had a house — an old one on Broadway in Little Rock. As his program grew, he moved it to larger and larger quarters. Serenity House became Serenity Park — an extended-care sanctuary for all, black or white, penniless or professional, who needed to get that monkey off their back.”

<sup>122</sup> Betty Rowland, “Some History about Wolfe Street Center: Run-down LR Residence Is Transformed to Facility to Combat Alcoholism,” special to the *Gazette*, March 14, 1983, at the Wolfe Street Foundation website at <http://wolfestreet.org/what-is-the-wolfe-street-foundation/> (as of Jan. 21, 2016). The original Wolfe Street center was set up in 1983 in a two-story house at 12th and Wolfe Streets in Little Rock, which had previously housed the Ruebel Funeral Home and later served as a residence for student nurses.

123 Kelly Foundation, Inc., 2801 West Roosevelt, Little Rock, AR 72204, see their website at <http://www.kellyfdn.com/about.htm> (as of Jan. 22, 2016). Jodi Sh. Doff, “Joe & Charlie: The Other Two Old Drunks,” *The Fix: Addiction and Recovery*, Straight Up, July 15, 2015. See <https://www.thefix.com/content/joe-charlie-other-two-old-drunks> (as of Jan. 21, 2016). “Recovery Dynamics and Joe McQ.” On the Serenity Recovery Centers website at <http://www.serenityrecovery.org/recovery-dynamics-and-joe-mcq/> (as of Jan. 20, 2016).

124 Joe McQuany, *Recovery Dynamics: Counselor’s Manual*, first edition copyright 1977. Latest edition — Little Rock, Arkansas: Kelly Foundation, Atlantic Books, 1989), used copies currently selling for up to \$600 to \$2,200.

<sup>125</sup> Kelly Foundation website at <http://www.kellyfdn.com/certified-facilities.htm> (as of Jan. 20, 2016).

<sup>126</sup> For more information on Serenity Park, Inc., see <http://treatment-facilities.healthgrove.com/l/176/Serenity-House> (as of Jan. 21, 2016).

<sup>127</sup> *Joe & Charlie Tapes*, Tape 1, Side A, p. 3, as recorded in Mesa, Arizona, February 6-8, 1987, from the transcript made by A.A. GSO Watch, available at <http://www.silkworth.net/gsowatch/jc/> (as of Jan. 11, 2015).

<sup>128</sup> Jodi Sh. Doff, “Joe & Charlie: The Other Two Old Drunks,” *The Fix: Addiction and Recovery*, July 15, 2015. Charles A. Parmley, Obituary in <http://www.aahistory.com/charliep/sign.php> (as of Dec. 29, 2015). Rob Fuhrman <stepnazi@yahoo.com> (stepnazi at yahoo.com), AAHistoryLovers message no. 7325 at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/7325> (as of Dec. 29, 2015).

<sup>129</sup> Joe McQuany and Charlie Parmley, *Joe & Charlie Tapes*, Tape 1, Side A, pp. 3-4, as recorded in Mesa, Arizona, February 6-8, 1987, from the transcript made by A.A. GSO Watch, available at <http://www.silkworth.net/gsowatch/jc/> (as of Jan. 11, 2015), see also <http://gsowatch.aamo.info/>.

<sup>130</sup> *Joe & Charlie Tapes*, Tape 1, Side A, p. 4.

<sup>131</sup> Joe McQ[uany], *The Steps We Took* (Little Rock, Arkansas: August House, 1990), p. 176. See also “Recovery Dynamics and Joe McQ[uany].” On the Serenity Recovery Centers website at <http://www.serenityrecovery.org/recovery-dynamics-and-joe-mcq/> (as of Dec. 30, 2015). Find A Grave, “Joseph Daniel McQuany,” go to <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=24058625> (as of Dec. 2, 2015). “History of Joe & Charlie Big Book Studies” on the Big Book Seminar website at <http://bigbookseminar.org/history-of-joe-charlie-big-book-studies/> (as of Dec. 28, 2015).

<sup>132</sup> Joe McQuany and Charlie Parmley, *Joe & Charlie Tapes*, Tape 1, Side A, p. 3, as recorded in Mesa, Arizona, February 6-8, 1987, from the transcript made by A.A. GSO Watch, available at <http://www.silkworth.net/gsowatch/jc/> (as of Jan. 11, 2016), see also <http://gsowatch.aamo.info/>.

<sup>133</sup> Joe McQ[uany], *The Steps We Took* (Little Rock, Arkansas: August House, 1990), p. 176.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Joe McQuany and Charlie Parmley, *Joe & Charlie Tapes*, Tape 1, Side A, p. 4.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>137</sup> “Recovery Dynamics and Joe McQ.” On the Serenity Recovery Centers website at <http://www.serenityrecovery.org/recovery-dynamics-and-joe-mcq/> (as of Dec. 30, 2015). Find A Grave, “Joseph Daniel McQuany,” go to <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=24058625> (as of Dec. 2, 2015). “History of Joe & Charlie Big Book Studies” on the Big Book Seminar website at <http://bigbookseminar.org/history-of-joe-charlie-big-book-studies/> (as of Dec. 28, 2015).

<sup>138</sup> Joe McQuany and Charlie Parmley, *Joe & Charlie Tapes*, Tape 1, Side A, p. 3.

<sup>139</sup> Sherry C. Hartsell, AAHistoryLovers message no. 4683 (Nov. 4, 2007) at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/4683> (as of Jan. 4, 2016) and message no. 7326 (Aug. 22,

2011) at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/7326> (as of Jan. 4, 2016). In the latter message, Hartsell says this happened in 1986 or 1987 instead of 1977, but there were no major snowstorms in east Texas in 1986 or 1987, and some of the other things Hartsell mentioned fit better with the 1977 date — he mentions that Joe and Charlie had only recently begun doing their talks together, which happened in 1977, and that shortly afterwards the Joe and Charlie Tapes began to spread all over the world, which happened in the summer of 1980.

<sup>140</sup> Sherry C. Hartsell, AAHistoryLovers message no. 7326 (Aug. 22, 2011) at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/7326> (as of Jan. 4, 2016).

<sup>141</sup> “Recovery Dynamics and Joe McQ.” On the Serenity Recovery Centers website at <http://www.serenityrecovery.org/recovery-dynamics-and-joe-mcq/> (as of Dec. 30, 2015). Find A Grave, “Joseph Daniel McQuany,” go to <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=24058625> (as of Dec. 2, 2015). “History of Joe & Charlie Big Book Studies” on the Big Book Seminar website at <http://bigbookseminar.org/history-of-joe-charlie-big-book-studies/> (as of Dec. 28, 2015).

<sup>142</sup> Joe McQuany and Charlie Parmley, *Joe & Charlie Tapes*, Tape 1, Side A, pp. 5-6, as recorded in Mesa, Arizona, February 6-8, 1987, from the transcript made by A.A. GSO Watch, available at <http://www.silkworth.net/gsowatch/jc/> (as of Jan. 11, 2016), see also <http://gsowatch.aamo.info/>.

<sup>143</sup> See “Recovery Dynamics and Joe McQ.” Also see Find A Grave, “Joseph Daniel McQuany” and “History of Joe & Charlie Big Book Studies.”

<sup>144</sup> John E. Reid from Brisbane, Queensland, Australia in AAHistoryLovers message no. 4073 at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/4073> (as of Jan. 3, 2016) spoke of “the legacy Wesley P left after his passing in 1985.” “Wesley sure did us all proud in New Orleans 1980 when he and Wayne P organised a luncheon with Lois W as the guest of Honour!!! Wesley had



planted audio copies of the Charlie and Joe Big Book Study cassette under selected chairs. Wesley had worked out who may well make good use of this material and his selections proved reasonably correct. There was a good number of Members from Australia at the luncheon and when we brought Charlie and Joe here during the 1980's they attributed the success to the growth in their approach, to the its real kick start God had provided through Wesley P's enthusiasm." "Wesley always talked about enthusiasm coming from an ancient word meaning 'God Within!!!!' He sure generated some enthusiasm in his short time Down Under in Australia."

Michael McGroarty in AAHistoryLovers message no. 10116 at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/10116> (as of Jan. 3, 2016) said that "Wesley Parrish came down to Daytona and used the printing press to start printing the 24 hour a day book."

Interview of A. Wesley Parrish (on 4/28/83, when he was 69 years old) by Bernice Browne in <http://12stephouse-1949.org/PDF/wesley.pdf> (as of Jan. 3, 2016). Wesley was a member of A.A. in Broward County, down on the southern coast of Florida, since 1947. He was 34 years old when he came into A.A. (Pompano Beach is in that county, just north of Fort Lauderdale, which is also in Broward County).

List of the members of the School Board of Broward County, Florida, at <http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/osbr/pdf/BoardHistory.pdf> (as of Jan. 3, 2016). "A. Wesley Parrish" was a member of the School Board from 1955 to 1966.

Parrish, Rena Griffith: obituary in the *Sun Sentinel* newspaper in Broward County, Florida on January 16, 2004. See [http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2004-01-16/news/0401160186\\_1\\_chatterton-chatterton-oakland-park-david-memorial-chapel/3](http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2004-01-16/news/0401160186_1_chatterton-chatterton-oakland-park-david-memorial-chapel/3) (as of Jan. 3, 2016). "Parrish, Rena Griffith, 89, passed away January 14, 2004 after a short illness. Rena was born December 20, 1914 in Tarentum, PA. She and her family moved to Ft. Lauderdale in 1926. As a child she loved the ocean and Ft. Lauderdale Beach. Rena graduated from Ft. Lauderdale High School in 1932. She married A. Wesley Parrish Sr., in May of 1936 and they moved to Pompano Beach. There they had two children and opened an

appliance business on Atlantic Blvd. They ran the business together for more than 30 years. After his death in 1985 she continued to work at Parrish Appliances with her son until last April. She was a member of the First United Methodist Church of Pompano Beach for over 60 years and helped build the original chapel. Rena was recognized as a pioneer of Broward County. She is survived by her son A. Wesley Parrish Jr. and his wife Barbara of Coconut Creek; daughter, Rena Patricia (Tish) Simerly of Hampton, VA. Her beloved grandchildren, Julian C. Simerly III (Lindsey), Bonnie Jean Parrish Rotunda (Tony); A. Wesley Parrish III, Lisa Simerly Morrow (Mark), Steven McKinstry Parrish (Marina), Thad Hollingsworth Simerly, and Michael Dale Parrish. She is also survived by nine great grandchildren. A Funeral Service will be held on Saturday, January 17, 2004 at the First United Methodist Church Chapel of Pompano Beach, 210 NE 3 Street at 2:00 PM. In lieu of flowers memorial contributions may be made to the First United Methodist Church of Pompano Bch. Arrangements by: KRAEER FUNERAL HOME AND CREMATION CENTER 200 N. Federal Highway Pompano Beach, FL 33062 954-941-4111."

Parrish, Archibald Wesley: genealogical records in Geni.com at <http://www.geni.com/people/Archibald-PARRISH/6000000003681378469> (as of Jan. 3, 2016) gives Archibald as his first name, his wife's maiden name as Griffith, and Nov. 15, 1913 as his date of birth.

Glenn F. Chesnut in "The Earliest Printings of Richmond Walker's Twenty-Four Hours a Day" at <http://hindsfoot.org/rwcvcphot.html> (as of Jan. 3, 2016) said that Past Delegate Bob Peden (from Goshen, Indiana, now deceased) told him that Wesley Parrish, an A.A. member in Daytona Beach, was a County Commissioner and obtained the use of the county printing press to publish the first printings of the Twenty-Four Hour book. The county was paid for the printing, but this arrangement may have made it easier to print small batches relatively inexpensively. Bob Peden told him that Parrish (whom Bob had met in the course of his A.A. activities) had come from Georgia down into Florida as a housing contractor. But Chesnut says that the only other historical information he was given by Peden was badly garbled and

mostly wrong, and in this case, Peden's account did not match well with our other data on Wesley Parrish.

<sup>145</sup> Joe McQuany and Charlie Parmley, *Joe & Charlie Tapes*, Tape 1, Side B, p. 27, as recorded in Mesa, Arizona, February 6-8, 1987, from the transcript made by A.A. GSO Watch, available at <http://www.silkworth.net/gsowatch/jc/> (as of Jan. 11, 2016), see also <http://gsowatch.aamo.info/>.

<sup>146</sup> Arthur S. (Arlington, Texas), Tom E. (Wappingers Falls, New York), and Glenn C. (South Bend, Indiana), *Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Recovery Outcome Rates: Contemporary Myth and Misinterpretation* (October 11, 2008), page 30. Available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/recout01.pdf> (as of Jan. 11, 2016).

<sup>147</sup> Joe McQ., *Carry This Message* (Atlanta, Georgia: August House, 2002) 1-6.

<sup>148</sup> For the date of the conference advisory see Arthur S. (Arlington, Texas), A Narrative Timeline of AA History at <http://hindsfoot.org/aatimeline.pdf> (as of June 25, 2017).

<sup>149</sup> Nancy Olson, "The Eighth A.A. International Convention: Montreal, Canada, 1985," in <http://www.barefootsworld.net/aa8thintl1985.html> (as of Jan. 22, 2016).

<sup>150</sup> Pearson, Bob. *A.A. World History 1985* (unpub. draft), p. 597.

<sup>151</sup> *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, November 2, 2007, editorial tribute to Joe McQ.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Obituary posted by Superior Funeral Home, 5017 E. Broadway, North Little Rock, Arkansas. "Theodoshia Cooper, 91, of Maumelle, an educated, beautiful, talented humanitarian passed December 16, 2016." See <http://m.arkansasonline.com/obituaries/2016/dec/21/theodoshia-cooper-2016-12-21/> (as of June 26, 2017).

<sup>154</sup> Reprinted in AAHistoryLovers message no. **Error! Main Document Only.4759**, see **Error! Main Document Only.**<https://>

groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/4759 (as of June 2, 2017).

<sup>155</sup> The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff was a historically black college founded in 1873 during the Reconstruction era. Arkansas Baptist College was another historically black college founded in 1884 by the Colored Baptists of the State of Arkansas.

<sup>156</sup> Francis Hartigan, *Bill W.: A Biography of Alcoholics Anonymous Cofounder Bill Wilson* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001) 181-182.

<sup>157</sup> See <http://www.barefootsworld.net/aaspecialgroups.html> (as of May 29, 2017).

<sup>158</sup> *Pass It On: The Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1984), pp. 316-317.