

# **The St. Louis Gambler & the Railroad Man**

## **Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Alcoholics Anonymous History**

# **The St. Louis Gambler & the Railroad Man**

**Lives and Teachings of the A.A.  
Old Timers Vol. 2**

**Glenn C.**

**Second Edition**

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Written for the groups in South Bend, Mishawaka,  
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Front cover: from a poster by Mitchell Markovitz, “Power of a Century,” in the collections of the National New York Central Railroad Museum, Elkhart, Indiana.

## **St. Joseph-Elkhart County Archives Project**

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collected with the aid of**

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## **Preface to the first edition**

This project was begun as part of the celebration of the Golden Anniversary of the Alcoholics Anonymous movement in South Bend, Elkhart, Mishawaka, and Goshen, Indiana in 1993. The present volume is the fruit of the following three years of research, and is presented, appropriately enough, at the Silver Anniversary meeting of the Michiana Regional Conference which brings A.A. members together from this region of northern Indiana and southern Michigan.

## **Preface to the second edition**

In the Spring of 1993, the groups in South Bend and Mishawaka asked one of their members to assemble this material to preserve the memory of how A.A. had first begun fifty years earlier in their part of the country, in the cities and towns of Indiana and Michigan which cluster around the St. Joseph river valley and the southeastern shore of Lake Michigan. It was intended just as a local project. No one at that time imagined that anyone outside of this area would be interested in it.

But then a number of A.A. groups began making annual pilgrimages to South Bend from many miles away, some from the Chicago area coming for an entire month every year, and others traveling at times from Ann Arbor and Lansing in Michigan, and from Bloomington in southern Indiana. Their lives had been saved, they said, by people who had been trained at the feet of Nick and Brownie and their South Bend friends, who had come to their town

and started A.A. groups there, bringing with them the tradition and the spirit of early St. Joseph river valley A.A. And they told us that there were many others from even further away, in places like New York City and Florida, who would be making that same pilgrimage if they did not live at such a distance.

And then a few copies of this book began to travel to other parts of the country, and an ever-increasing number of calls started coming in for copies to pass around there too, and we began to realize to an even greater extent that we had something of more than just local interest. We were told that this collection of stories made sense of what the twelve step program was about in a way that people could understand and relate to in their part of the country also, better in its own way than anything they had read before. They told us that it gave a picture of the depths of the inner misery of alcoholism and addiction that struck a deep chord in their hearts. One good old-timer told us that “this book describes the way alcoholics actually think better than anything I have ever read.” Newcomers said that it opened their eyes and “made sense” out of what they were going through. Even more importantly, this collection of stories gave a clear and moving vision of the new hope which the twelve step program offered, and showed people how to begin walking the path that led to that new and blessed life.

Then psychotherapists who were treating people who had problems with alcohol and drugs began begging for copies too. They said they were loaning copies of it to their patients to read, because this book seemed to deliver the message which they most needed to hear, better than anything else they had come up with.

A very successful book which came out in 2001, *The Higher Power of the Twelve-Step Program: For Believers and Non-Believers*, was based on the message of the St. Joseph river valley A.A. teachers. Some of the key people in the development of

modern alcoholism treatment in the United States said that it was the first thing they had encountered which gave truly useful help to newcomers who were atheists and agnostics — people who up to that point had always been turned away by any kind of spiritual approach to recovery. And they too begged us to reprint the original stories of these Hoosier old timers.

It became clear that it was time to do another printing of the original historical account. This second edition has been divided into two volumes, with the second half given a separate title, *The St. Louis Gambler and the Railroad Man*. The first volume contains the stories of Ken M. (the factory owner), Nick K. (the convict), and Jimmy M., a woman who was one of the first two black people to come into the South Bend program. The second volume continues with the stories of Brownie (the St. Louis gambler), Ed P. (the railroad man), Ellen L., and Goshen Bill. The preparation of this new edition has provided an opportunity to revise an occasional very badly put together sentence or paragraph — the first edition was written rather hurriedly — and to add an appendix talking about the books these good old timers read, but this is otherwise the same book which was put together for our local Indiana A.A. groups nine years ago.

Last but not least, very special thanks must be given to Frank N. of Syracuse, Indiana, the northern Indiana A.A. archivist, who has walked every step of the way during those years, encouraging and supporting and contributing his own talents as an interviewer and researcher. If we measured his contribution only in terms of days spent and miles journeyed, that would be reason enough to thank him. But he is one who has truly thrown himself into the spirit and complete dedication of old time A.A., and has been above all the best friend anyone could ever have.

# Introduction

The St. Joseph river winds its way south out of Michigan into the rolling hills and corn fields of Indiana, then curves back northwards into the flowering orchards and sandy dunelands of Michigan once again, emptying eventually into the vast waters of Lake Michigan, stretching further than the eye can see. The city of South Bend was so named because it was built at that southern bend in the great river, at the place where French fur traders in long ago times lifted their canoes out of the water and portaged them over to the Kankakee river, in order to paddle their way down to New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico.

South Bend is probably best known to the modern American public because of the University of Notre Dame football team, cheered and supported by numerous loyal sports fans all over the country. But the city has always been much more than a university town. It was in fact, from its beginning, also an important upper midwestern industrial center. In the 1940's it was a big factory town, the heart of the most important industrial complex between Chicago and Detroit. The Studebaker automobile plant — which had started out producing horse-drawn vehicles and had built most of the covered wagons heading west during frontier days — was now producing design concepts far in advance of all the other major American car manufacturers. And this was only one of many factory complexes, for companies like Bendix, Ball Band, Singer, and many

others had large plants in South Bend and its twin city of Mishawaka.

On February 22, 1943, a South Bend factory owner named Kenneth G. Merrill and a mechanical engineer named Joseph Soulard “Soo” Cates started the first A.A. meeting in that region. Ken’s plant produced industrial pipe fittings which were sold all over the world. He was not only a brilliant practical psychologist but a superb salesman, and people with drinking problems soon began coming from many miles away and attending South Bend meetings, and then going back home and forming A.A. groups in their own home towns. In this way, A.A. quickly spread outwards from that original center to all of the greater St. Joseph river valley area, and along the southeastern coast of Lake Michigan almost to Chicago.

In the first volume of this work, *The Factory Owner and the Convict*, the story of South Bend A.A. in the 1940’s was told: Ken Merrill’s life and breakdown, and his eventual discovery of the new A.A. movement, along with the tale of Nick Kowalski and the forming of the nationally famous prison A.A. group at the state penitentiary nearby. It also gave an account of how Bill Hoover and a young woman named Jimmy Miller started one of the earliest black A.A. groups in the country — a story that in fact has things to teach about courage and commitment and iron determination which are applicable to people of all races and backgrounds. If you the reader are feeling that you live in a world where everyone around you looks down on you and treats you with contempt, because your skin is the wrong color, or you speak the wrong language, or you are too thin or too fat or too poorly dressed or ill-educated, Bill and Jimmy will make it clear to you that if you want to get drug-free and sober, no one on this earth can stop you, and that all of these other things you are so concerned about are ultimately irrelevant. The only real

question is, are you actually willing to do what it will take, even if it requires doing what they had to do?

In this second volume, *The St. Louis Gambler and the Railroad Man*, the narrative is continued. It begins with the story of Brownie, a former professional gambler from St. Louis, who got sober in South Bend in 1950, and soon became one of the great A.A. leaders in the area. And the story will also be told of the way the A.A. message spread up the St. Joseph river to the major railroad center of Elkhart, and from there to the town of Goshen yet further to the east.

In the last part of this volume, three of the major Elkhart and Goshen figures tell their stories: we will first meet Ellen Lantz, who gives us a woman's point of view, and the unforgettable Goshen Bill, whose little tales and terse aphorisms cut through all the nonsense and went directly to the heart of every issue. Goshen Bill could instantly demolish any alcoholic alibi or excuse ever invented with a single sentence, usually delivered with one of his long bony fingers pointed straight in your face! And we will finish by listening to Ed Pike the railroad conductor, a very wise man, who was one of the most deeply beloved A.A. figures in the entire St. Joseph river valley area. We will let him bless us at the end of this book with his peace, as a kind of concluding benediction to the entire work.

All of these people lived the program and knew how to explain it in words of extraordinary clarity and insight. These two volumes are an attempt to put it down on paper, so that their message will not be lost now that they are gone. It is too important to allow it to be lost. Those who listen to their words will not only get sober but discover the road that leads to the sunlight of the spirit.

Is there any special characteristic to A.A. in the St. Joseph river valley? There is an extraordinary depth and profundity of spirituality among these great teachers and their disciples which has instantly struck everyone who has visited our area. It is not clear why the

spirit has spoken so strongly here amidst our factories and cornfields, but we know that God had a reason, and our task is simply to do our best to pass it on to the rest of the world.

It is also great fun reading about these colorful characters. You can read this volume just for the enjoyment of some marvelous tales about some delightful and sometimes totally outrageous men and women whom you will never forget.

But they were God bearers, channels of the spirit, people who embodied the saving message in an extraordinary fashion. Their lives and words shone with the divine light. All of us in the groups here pray that this light may also shine upon you and give you peace.

# **Part One**

## **Brownie**

## Chapter 1

# 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. 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>1</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. 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.

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.

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've [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.

We remember the statistic that Ken M. gave back in 1944 in one of his early radio broadcasts in South Bend: only one drinker in two hundred is an alcoholic.<sup>2</sup> That was typical of the very low figures given at that time. Here in 2005, a little over sixty years later, we would give a figure that is much higher: ten per cent of the American population already show some of the negative symptoms of alcoholism and would be far better off not drinking at all, and five to seven per cent are clearly alcoholic and are already in big trouble. The calculated percentage of alcoholics was so low in those earlier figures 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>3</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>4</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.

In reality, as has already been noted, at least ten per cent of the adult population in the United States show early symptoms of the syndrome, and at least five to seven per cent are already in major trouble. The great problem is *denial* in these 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 an early-stage alcoholic to realize the actual degree of his 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>5</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.

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, usually 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 feets 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 something that hurt 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 alkies that I drank with came over to Granite City, Illinois, where the hospital I was in [was located], 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. begin 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 (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 the alcoholic, but they have no useful information for him about how he might actually go about treating his 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 I. tells newcomers.

The prayer of the practicing 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 the alcoholic does not want to give that kind of "blind" trust to anyone or anything outside himself.

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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 the young Nick Kowalski, 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.

## Chapter 2

# Down and Out in South Bend

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) in South Bend, 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 worser and worser. 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>6</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 him 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, have to be given a little more ego-reduction before he would be amenable to hearing the small still voice of God that speaks within?

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 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, 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.

Brownie was going 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!

There were no nightclubs in South Bend like the ones Brownie had frequented in St. Louis, but someone like Nick Kowalski 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 N. (a Hungarian 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 movie scenes for 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 the silent movie version of

“Uncle Tom’s Cabin” (the nightmare scene where she is trying to escape across the dark frozen river, but the ice floes suddenly start breaking up and tipping under her feet).

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 chevvu 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. The alcoholic can know full well that he is killing himself with his 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, the alcoholic must first make one fundamental choice himself: he must decide that *he wants 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 I., who had both Brownie and Bill Hoover as his sponsors and has now become 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. 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 M., 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 M. 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 [doing this or that]. 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 I., 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 groundshift 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 3**

# **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 H. 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 I. 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 M.’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 professor 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 said, in a lead he gave in Ann Arbor, that Brownie had a standard response to alcoholics who used that kind of excuse:<sup>7</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 — 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 I. 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 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 K., who ended up moving to Lansing in the 1970's and starting an A.A. group there.<sup>8</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 groups were formed, by Red K. 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 I. 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 other distant places who regard themselves as the children of Brownie, Nick Kowalski, and Red K.

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* [we read at meetings it says that it] "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. 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 was quoting from the First Letter of John in the New Testament. Goshen Bill also liked to quote this same passage (see Chapter 10). 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 I. 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.*

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.

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 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.

## **Part Two**

### **Up the River to Elkhart and Goshen**

## **Chapter 4**

# **The Lawyer with the Bottle in His Umbrella**

If you follow the St. Joseph river upstream from South Bend and Mishawaka, you soon come to the small city of Elkhart, Indiana, with its sprawling railroad yards and (nowadays) its numerous mobile home and recreational vehicle factories. You have to go slightly farther east, to towns like Shipshewana, to see the streets filled continuously with the black buggies of the Amish, drawn by their sleek, fast-trotting horses, but even in Elkhart you occasionally see a bearded Amishman or conservative Mennonite in his dark suit, or some of their women in their long, plain dresses, with bonnets (“prayer coverings” they call them) always atop their heads, indoors or out.

It is a city of enormous contrasts — of millionaires, of skilled craftsmen who make fine musical instruments, of hard-drinking, hard-brawling railroad workers, of “hillbillies” up from Kentucky and Tennessee to work in the trailer and recreational vehicle factories, and — if local folklore is to be believed — it is also a town where some of the wealthier and more powerful members of the Chicago Mob would build fine homes in order to raise their families in peace and security, removed a hundred miles for safety from the

violence of rival gangsters battling over control of the streets of the great metropolis.

## **Willard Chester**

In the 1940's, one of the more prominent people in Elkhart was Willard Chester, a member of an old and distinguished Elkhart family who was the lawyer for the railroad, one of the most important sources of the city's prosperity in those days. Willard C. never drove an automobile, so wherever he had to go around the city, he would always ride the bus. Over the years, the bus drivers had all come to recognize his figure quite well, and one of the things that they puzzled about among themselves, was the fact that Willard always carried a furled umbrella with him, even during those periods that sometimes come in an Indiana summer, when the hot sun beats down on the cornfields for days without a letup, and the weatherman has to say, regretfully, that their weather maps show not one single rain cloud or prairie thunderstorm developing to the west.

Then one day, a bus driver happened to glance in the mirror over his windshield at precisely the right time, and the mystery was solved: surreptitiously Willard C.'s hand sneaked down into his furled umbrella, brought up a bottle, and took a quick pick-me-up before shoving it back down among the black folds once again.<sup>9</sup>

Willard C. was an alcoholic, a maintenance drinker by that point, who could not make it through the day without nipping at a bottle continually. Like all alcoholics, he knew down deep that there was something wrong with the way he drank, and so he would sneak his drinks, trying to keep the people around him from ever realizing just how often he had to refortify himself just to go on another hour or so. He was a highly successful man by the world's standards. But like alcoholics everywhere, the thoughts and feelings going on inside

his head were so horrible that he could not make it through the day without anesthetizing his mind over and over, from morning to night, trying to numb himself again the minute the previous drink began to wear off.

In addition, by that point in the progression of his alcoholism, he would start to have the shakes and go into a violent physical reaction unless there was alcohol in his system at all times. Alcoholics by that stage can sometimes go into convulsions and die if they try to stop drinking totally all at once without adequate medical supervision.

When Nick K. put together his handwritten list of early people in South Bend A.A., he noted that “by 1945 many out of town persons came to So. Bend A.A. Some of those who started groups in other towns were” Willard Chester, Ray G., and Dr. Jack Swihart from Elkhart, and Dean Barnhardt and Mac McCaffery from Goshen.<sup>10</sup> The South Bend group formed the original nucleus from which A.A. began in the region, but the Elkhart and Goshen A.A. people had their own schedule of meetings within a short time after the founding of the original South Bend group in 1943.

Willard C. was clearly one of the most visible leaders of Alcoholics Anonymous in Elkhart at its beginning (c. 1944-45). Ed Pike remembered how, at his first A.A. meeting, Willard C., the prominent lawyer for the railroad and a very important man in that town, was warmly welcoming to him, a drunken railroad conductor, and made it clear that he genuinely and unfeignedly cared for him as a person. It was one of the things that suddenly gave him hope, for the first time in years. Ellen Lantz told how Willard C. came out to the filling station she and her husband owned, long after midnight, to make the twelfth-step call that first brought her into the A.A. program. Neither Ed nor Ellen ever forgot that Willard was one of the people who was there for them when they hit their personal

bottom, and showed them the first glimmerings of the way out of the pit.

There are many mysteries in the way God's providence works. Willard C. ceased to be a hero for A.A. folk in Elkhart and Goshen when, after a number of years of sobriety, he went back to drinking once again, and stayed drunk for all the remaining years of his life. But if it had not been for Willard C., would there have ever been a sober Ed Pike and Ellen Lantz? And if there had never been an Ed or an Ellen, would there have been a thriving set of A.A. groups in Elkhart and Goshen years later, still saving the lives of hundreds of hopeless alcoholics?

Not too many years ago, one of Willard C.'s grandsons had, along with his wife, gotten deeply ensnared in alcoholism. Many practicing alcoholics try to pretend that it is their external problems which make them drink, and that if *other people* (or God!) would start behaving the way they wanted them to behave, they would not have to drink compulsively any longer. But the grandson was an extremely capable young attorney, whose career was already firmly established; his wife was an extraordinarily attractive young woman, with outward poise and presence, and with everything going for her too. They had an extremely nice house on the St. Joseph river, a boat where they could party with their friends out on the river on the warm Indiana summer evenings, children to love, and everything else that most people dream of as "the good life."

And yet neither the grandson nor his wife could stop drinking. The wife discovered A.A. first. One weekend she was at an A.A. picnic and campfire with the children. Her husband was like many an alcoholic, and could not stand being alone in the house by himself, left in isolation with nothing but the bottle and his own thoughts. Finally, in desperation, he came to the A.A. get-together in the park just so he would not have to be alone, and discovered to his

total amazement that *this was where he belonged*.<sup>11</sup> Would there have been an A.A. campfire and picnic there had it not been for Willard C.? Certainly, some of the real good in Willard's soul had been passed on to other people in the Elkhart A.A. movement, so that in a very real sense, the spirit of love and healing and power around the campfire that evening had a little bit of Willard C.'s spirit in it. The good in him had lived on.

His grandson and the grandson's wife are both of them still sober today, and the younger children at least will not have been brought up in a home where the parents were drunks. And so, in the paradoxes of God's providence, Willard C., who ultimately could not stay sober himself, saved the lives of countless other alcoholics (directly or indirectly), *including the lives of his own grandchildren and great-grandchildren*. If we do just a little bit of good in God's name, at just one point in our lives, then regardless of what we did before — or even what we do later on — God will make sure that the good we did was not done in vain.

### **Charles F. “Chuck” Keller**

Another early figure in Elkhart A.A. was Charles F. Keller, of the Whitcomb & Keller Real Estate company, which was one of the most important real estate agencies in the South Bend-Mishawaka-Elkhart area during that period. The name “Chuck Keller” was on the list Ken Merrill drew up of the first twenty people who came in during the initial two or three years of the South Bend A.A. movement and stayed sober, so he was clearly one of the real old timers.<sup>12</sup> Although he lived and worked in Elkhart, his inclusion on Ken's list shows that he kept up contact during the years that followed, with the South Bend people who had gotten him sober.

A.A. in Elkhart was therefore started somewhere between 1943 and 1945, by contact with the group which had just been formed in South Bend, when Elkhart people began driving over and meeting with Ken Merrill, Soo Cates, and the rest of the very early South Bend group. Willard C., Charles K., and several other Elkhart people first got sober by going to those South Bend meetings, then decided to start their own regular meetings in Elkhart.

Charles K. eventually married Henrietta, the widow of Soo Cates (the man who had founded the South Bend A.A. group in 1943 along with Ken Merrill). Henrietta outlived Charles as well — the Elkhart City Directory for 1962 lists Henrietta G. Keller as “wid[ow] Chas F” — but they must have had fifteen or sixteen good years together.<sup>13</sup>

An account of early A.A. history in Indiana, preserved in the New York A.A. archives and put together in late 1954 or early 1955, comments on the fact that Charles F. Keller married Mrs. Cates, and “is still an active member”<sup>14</sup> there in the mid 1950’s. Ken M.’s letter to Ed Young in 1960 assures Ed that everyone on his list was either still in the program and still sober, or had died sober. Since Charles K. was still living in 1960, he was clearly still in the program and still sober and worthy of being honored as one of the twenty original founders of A.A. in north-central Indiana, although there are indications that his health may have been starting to fail by that point. He apparently died sometime during the next year, 1961.

The listings in the 1960 Elkhart City Directory indicate that Charles still held the title of president and treasurer of Whitcomb & Keller Elkhart Corporation at the time the directory was put together, although his wife Henrietta had had to take over some of the responsibilities of running the business. In the 1961 directory, Charles K. was still listed as living, and as president and treasurer of the Elkhart end of the business, but in the listing for the business

itself, the name had been changed to Whitcomb & Keller Mortgage Co., Inc., and the only officer listed was “Jonathan E Moyer Branch Mgr.” The 1962 directory then listed Henrietta (still residing at the same home, 1535 Lawndale Rd.) as the *widow* of Charles F. Keller.

The real estate office, at 424 S. Second Street (between Marion and Franklin Streets in downtown Elkhart), is no longer there. Most of that block was taken over by the NBD Bank Building and the bank’s parking lots. The Elkhart *Truth* building is across the street from where the real estate office used to be.<sup>15</sup>

Charles and Henrietta’s home is still there however, at 1535 Lawndale Road, one block north of the St. Joe river, slightly east of downtown Elkhart — a pleasant, beautifully-kept-up family neighborhood of post-World War II houses, some frame and others brick, with nice-looking children riding their bikes and walking down the sidewalks chattering away. The house they lived in is a one-story, white, sided ranch style house, not extremely big, but with a two-car garage attached by a small, glass-enclosed sun room, stretching across a big, wide lot with lots of lawn. There is a small ground-level front porch as an entryway, and a chimney for a fireplace to the left of the porch, made out of what was originally red brick, now painted white.

The A.A. program teaches us to be concerned with spiritual things and not the material realm, but alcoholics find — when they quit drinking and get sober and keep on working the program — that God provides them with *what they actually need*, and that whatever they have, be it much or little, it is always something for which they can feel *gratitude and joy*. Everyone who works the program finds that he is a rich man, a wealthy woman, with a life filled with countless gifts, far beyond anything he or she ever deserved, or would even have dreamed of praying for — but part of this comes from discovering the miracle of the everyday, the graciousness of the

ordinary simple pleasures, and the delights of friends more precious than rubies or gold.

When we see the ordinary and everyday touched with the sunlight of the spirit, it shines like gold, and we suddenly realize that it is neither ordinary nor everyday but the miracle of God's creation blossoming before our very eyes, given to us out of love for our enjoyment and pleasure. The infinite goodness of God shines out in even a single leaf or flower, the feeling of a warm bed at night, the taste of a peanut butter sandwich, the welcome (and tolerance for our foibles) in the eyes of the A.A. people in our home group, the simple humanity and willingness to listen on the part of a sponsor woken up out of a sound sleep at three o'clock in the morning by his pigeon's telephone call, and the way the sponsor's love and care transforms the pigeon's hysteria or despair into calm and renewed hope.

### **Other early members**

**BILLIE CLOSE:** She left California when she got divorced and came with her two children to Elkhart, where her parents lived, and got a job as a secretary for a firm there. She and Claire C. and Ellen Lantz teamed up for a while during the early years to put up women alcoholics in their own homes for a few days after they had been released from the detoxification ward at the Elkhart hospital.<sup>16</sup>

**CLAIRE MORSE / CLAIRE CROWLESS:** Nick's List says that Claire M. was one of the early women members in the area, although not which town she lived in. Ken Merrill's daughter Martha P. said that this was Claire Morse, where the first letter of the last name matches the initial in Nick's List. Pat Wilkie (a Scotswoman, who was married to Tony Wilkie from the prison program, and was one of the real old timers from this area at the time

of her death) said that the only Claire she had known from the early days lived in Elkhart and had some kind of job in the radio-television business. Ellen Lantz said that the woman whom Pat Wilkie knew was Claire Crowliss, who was originally from Pennsylvania, and that Claire was a secretary at WTRC radio station in Elkhart.<sup>17</sup> Claire was not that common a first name, and there were not many women members at that time, so this may well have been the same person, with the two different last names (Morse and Crowliss) reflecting a divorce or marriage at some point. As noted in the previous paragraph, Claire C. joined with Ellen and Billie Close in trying to establish some post-hospitalization help for women alcoholics in Elkhart at one point during the early years.

**ED PIKE & BOBBY:** Ed Pike, the railroad conductor, and his then wife, Bobby, came into the Elkhart A.A. program after regular meetings had already been established, so he was not one of the original founders, but he was one of the leading figures in the A.A. movement in the South Bend-Elkhart area for many years. Jimmy Miller, one of the first two black members of A.A. in the area, remembered him well. When his name was brought up in her conversation with G.C., her eyes grew tender and she said, in a soft, affectionate voice, “Ed Pike was a wonderful man.” To her that simple accolade said it all. G.C. later passed on that heartfelt tribute to Molly S., who had been Nick K.’s closest friend during his latter years, and who also had known Ed well. Molly got the same look in her eyes, thinking back on her warm memories of Ed’s goodness and decency, and simply whispered, “True.” This was the eloquence of parsimony — to describe Ed Pike, and who he was, and how he had treated you, no further words were necessary. There will be a long section, in the chapters that follow, drawn from one of Ed’s leads which was preserved on tape. And Ed’s first wife Bobby, who was a

tiny ball of energy, also played a major role in Elkhart A.A. during the earliest years.

**ELLEN LANTZ:** She came into the A.A. program in Elkhart on September 7, 1947, shortly after Ed and Bobby Pike joined. She had three relapses over the next three and a half years, but after recovering consciousness on March 27, 1951, from her last drunken blackout, she maintained continuous sobriety all the way to her death c. 1985 or 86. Marty Gallagher said that, in the years after he came into the program in the mid-1950's, Ellen Lantz, Ellen Leppert, and Zora were the three women alcoholics in the Elkhart area who were the most active and involved. There will be a long section, in the chapters that follow, based on Ellen's lead and reminiscences.

**ELLEN LEPPERT:** This other Ellen was also among the three most active and involved women alcoholics in the Elkhart area according to Marty Gallagher.

**G.G.G.:** The South Bend group, the original nucleus from which the A.A. movement spread to the surrounding areas of Indiana and Michigan, was founded on February 22, 1943. The first correspondence from Elkhart officially recorded in the New York A.A. Archives appeared a little over two years later, and was from a "G.G.G." (otherwise unknown) dated June 5, 1945, requesting that "I be listed as the secretary and contact man for the Elkhart, Indiana group in your next directory." This is the closest thing we have to a date to mark the official founding of A.A. in Elkhart, but there were almost certainly people from that city getting sober in A.A. a year or more earlier.

**DR. JACK SWIHART:** Nick K.'s List said that Dr. Jack S. was one of the out-of-town people who were coming to A.A. in South Bend by 1945, and that he then became one of the founders of the A.A. group in Elkhart. Marty Gallagher said that this was a physician named Dr. Jack Swihart, who lived on Circle Avenue. When the closed A.A. meetings were still being held in houses, his home was one of the places where they met.<sup>18</sup> Ellen Lantz said that she and Dr. Jack's wife Louise often made the pies to serve at the Saturday night open meeting.

**DR. ART KISTNER:** Marty Gallagher said that there was another physician also in early Elkhart A.A., a Dr. Art Kistner.<sup>19</sup>

**RAY G.:** Nick K.'s List says that Ray G. was also among the out-of-town people coming to A.A. in South Bend by 1944 or 1945, and that he also was one of the founders of the Elkhart A.A. group when they subsequently decided to start their own meetings back home. Nick says that Ray G. was also one of those attending the first area A.A. Retreat in 1947.

**ZORA:** Marty Gallagher said that in the early years after he came into the A.A. program in Elkhart in 1954, Ellen Lantz, Ellen Leppert, and Zora were the three women in A.A. who were most active. He says that Zora had been sober since 1945 or earlier. In 1951, when Ellen Lantz had her last drunk, it was Zora who took charge and pushed her into writing the fourth step that enabled Ellen to stay sober without relapses from that point on. Ellen said that Zora had married Jim Hummel, who was also in A.A., and used the last name Hummel at that time.<sup>20</sup>

## Marty Gallagher

When research on this book was first begun, Marty Gallagher was the person in the Elkhart area whose participation in A.A. went back further than anyone living. He was of great help in sorting through these early names. Marty was a good Irishman, with twinkly eyes and a sense of humor; he was about seventy-seven years old, a widower for the past several years, with around forty-two years sobriety. He first started going to A.A. meetings in Rogers Park in Chicago in 1953, but then took a job in Elkhart in 1954 and started going to the A.A. meetings there. He says he did not start getting any quality sobriety until then.

Brooklyn Bob F. (the former New York newspaper executive who got sober in South Bend) and Submarine Bill C., both good Irishmen themselves, were talking with G.C. once about Marty, and commented that, in his younger years, Marty could be quite a wild man. G.C. started laughing, and said to them, “you mean he was such a wild man that even the other Irish sometimes noticed he was a bit wild!” Then everybody started laughing.

Marty had a large get-together of A.A. people and their spouses every St. Patrick’s Day, with corned beef and cabbage, and Irish soda bread which he baked himself, which was always a delightful party. And he was a mainstay at the Old Timers Luncheon on the last Thursday of every month at Peddler’s Village. This was a place halfway between Elkhart and Goshen, which had a Mennonite restaurant. Many of the women working there wore the traditional bonnets on their heads (called “prayer coverings”), and kept the buffet table loaded with hearty Swiss-American farm cooking: fried chicken, steak cooked in thick brown gravy, mashed potatoes and noodles, all sorts of vegetables (green beans, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, sweet corn, squash, and all the other things you would

grow in a farm garden), thick slabs of cornbread, and bread pudding with raisins in it for dessert.

When you walked into the restaurant, you saw a long table, with fifteen or twenty silver-haired men sitting around it, old in years but young at heart, chatting and smiling and joking quietly with one another. Resentment and fearfulness, self-pity and despair, angry quarrels and arguments, had all been banished, for they no longer dwelt in the darkness, but had set themselves to try to walk in the will of God on the sunny side of the street. Their eyes sparkled, and they laughed at themselves, and they were just old men, but they seemed somehow to glow with some strange light which can only be discerned by the eyes of the spirit. It was healing to the soul just to be around them, for they embodied all the quiet serenity and joy and compassion to which the twelve steps lead.

I cannot believe that any poor struggling soul who walked into that restaurant and sat at that table with them, even just one time, would not want what they had, and want it more than anything else in the world. That was why this book was written, to try to describe, somehow or some way, how the best of the good old timers gained that kind of blessed life. And every bit of the work that went into this book will have been worth it if a single reader can obtain just a glimpse of what those men and women had.

## **Chapter 5**

# **Goshen and Other Indiana and Michigan Towns**

The Elkhart river flows into the St. Joseph river at the place where the city of Elkhart is located; if you follow the subsidiary river upstream a few miles, you come to the town of Goshen, which (although only half the size) is the county seat of Elkhart county, and the place where people from the city of Elkhart have to go for courthouse business. Although there is not a lot of information preserved from the early days, it is possible to say a little about the origins of A.A. in Goshen, and to mention a few of the early names.

### **Dean B. and George M.**

Dean Barnhardt seems to have been the first steady A.A. attender from Goshen, coming into Elkhart for meetings until a Goshen group was started. In fact, in Nick's List,<sup>21</sup> it says that Dean B. was already going to A.A. meetings in South Bend before the Elkhart group itself was established, so he was an old-timer with some experience under his belt by the standards of that time.

Ellen Lantz, who first came into contact with the Elkhart A.A. group on September 7, 1947, talked in her reminiscences about the

way A.A. later spread to Goshen, and spoke not only about Dean B., but also about another early Goshen member, George Mills:<sup>22</sup>

ELLEN: Oh, and when Goshen started, I remember when Goshen started. All those Goshen people used to come over to Elkhart. And when I lived out in Dunlap, when I first come in, there was just one man from Goshen, and he was coming to Elkhart every week for a meeting. I didn't have a car, I didn't have transportation, he used to stop and pick me up . . . . And then they began to get two or three, and they started . . . .

STAN: He was, as far as you know, the only A.A. member in Goshen? What was his name?

ELLEN: Yeah, at that time. Yeah, it was Dean Barnhardt, and he was some editor or something of the Goshen paper or something like that. Ed knows him more 'n I do. Well, I meant, knows more about his background than I do.

And then George Mills was another one, from . . . I don't know if he's still in Goshen or not. But he was a little older than I, he could be dead by now, I don't know.

### **Clifford S., C.L.K., and Mac McC.**

Other bits and pieces of the story of the establishment of the group in Goshen, Indiana, can be partially reconstructed. The town was first listed in the New York GSO Directory in February 1948 with two groups: the Monday Night Group with twenty-four members (and Clifford S. as the contact) and the Wednesday Night Group with twelve members (and C.L.K. as the contact).<sup>23</sup> These two people are otherwise unidentifiable at present. Mac McCaffery was one of the out-of-town people who were coming to A.A. meetings in South Bend c. 1944-45 (according to Nick's List) and

was later one of the founders of the Goshen group. But he apparently also continued to participate actively in South Bend A.A., since Nick says that he was one of the people who helped set up the first Alano Club in South Bend in 1947.<sup>24</sup> Pat Wilkie said that he was an Irishman, and looked very much like one. Maureen H. says that this was the McCaffery of McCaffery Lighting, a business now located at 1628 N. Ironwood Drive in South Bend.<sup>25</sup>

### **The spread of A.A. from Elkhart up into Michigan: Three Rivers, Constantine, Mendon, Kalamazoo, Dowagiac and Niles**

In much the same fashion, A.A. began spreading to other towns and cities throughout the St. Joseph River Valley and the adjoining parts of northern Indiana and southwestern Michigan, and then along the coast of Lake Michigan up and down from the point where the St. Joseph river empties into the lake. First one person would drive, sometimes for miles, to attend weekly meetings at a place where A.A. was already established — principally South Bend and Elkhart in the earliest years. After gaining enough sobriety, this person would then found the first group in his or her own home town. In those days, people throughout that region would also regularly attend meetings in other people's towns, so that a network of constant contacts was kept going continuously.

Ellen Lanz talked in her reminiscences<sup>26</sup> about this kind of interchange:

O.K., at one time, and it was in the early 60's, we had members coming from Three Rivers in Michigan, and Constantine, Michigan. The one was a druggist in Constantine. And they did have a group in Three Rivers,

and we used to interchange. And the one in Constantine did not want to go to Three Rivers, because he was too well known, and he really wanted his anonymity to be kept. And so he came to Elkhart. And was he ever surprised when he found out that my parents lived in Constantine! [*Ellen laughs heartily*] And so when I'd go down there, I'd go down to the drugstore, and I'd say "Hi, Kenneth!" One day my dad says, "I didn't know you knew him." I said, "Oh, I've seen him around," and let it go at that. But he really wanted his anonymity.

And then there was a member in Mendon, Michigan, that used to come down. And Kalamazoo [Michigan] used to go back and forth. Ed was always getting good speakers from Chicago and Michigan. And we had one fellow that started here . . . and moved to Dowagiac [Michigan], and finally he got a group going in Dowagiac, so he didn't have to drive to Elkhart all the time. Same as Dean got the group going in Goshen so he didn't have to come to Elkhart all the time. And then they finally got a group going in Constantine, because finally anonymity didn't mean that much [to Kenneth]. Uh, White . . . uh, everybody knew he had a problem. I guess he finally decided . . . it didn't really make any difference now that he was sober.

Niles, Michigan, was just north of the Indiana state line, located on the great Dixie Highway which ran through South Bend heading to Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, and Florida (one of the first major modern highways to cross the United States from north to south), so A.A. spread from South Bend to Niles very quickly. Nick K.'s List says that Eli E., Milo M., and Sam F. in Niles were coming to meetings in South Bend from Niles at a very early time (probably c. 1944-45), and then started an A.A. group back in Niles itself.

Molly S. thinks that the Sam F. referred to here was Sam Foley and his wife T, who got sober at the very beginning of the Alcoholics

Anonymous movement, before the Big Book came out in 1939, and were mentioned in early A.A. reports as having been present at the first A.A. meeting held either in Chicago or its suburb of Evanston, Illinois. Gil L. agrees with Molly and says that Sam Foley and his wife were indeed involved in the very beginnings of A.A. in Chicago before they moved to Niles, Michigan.

### **Ellen L., Goshen Bill, and Ed P.**

But the best way to talk about the early days of A.A. in Elkhart and Goshen is to let three people speak who left their words in tape recorded leads and interviews: Ellen Lantz (one of the best sponsors of women alcoholics in the entire area), the colorful and unforgettable figure of Goshen Bill, and the beloved Ed Pike. The chapters that follow will let them speak to us themselves from that past era.

### **The spread of A.A. from South Bend to other Indiana cities and towns to the west and south**

Nick K.'s List gave the names of various people from Indiana towns to the west and south who got sober initially by coming to the meetings in South Bend in the period from c. 1944–45, and then subsequently helped start A.A. groups back in their own home towns.

**GARY AND HAMMOND (including the nearby towns of Hobart, Merrillville, St. John, and Wheeler):** Gary and Hammond lie outside of the St. Joseph river valley itself in the narrow sense, and are located on the shores of Lake Michigan, southwest of the point where the river empties into the lake. The

interesting observation here is that, in spite of their closeness to Chicago, where A.A. was strongly established at a very early date, the beginnings of the A.A. groups in Gary and Hammond seem to have been tied at least as much to South Bend A.A., if not more so. So it seems fair to regard this part of northwestern Indiana as part of the greater St. Joseph river valley area, in terms of the way A.A. spread. In early Indiana history, small river boats went down the St. Joseph river from Elkhart, Mishawaka and South Bend, and then along the southeastern coast of Lake Michigan, so that Gary and Hammond and Michigan City (all located on the lake's south shore) were bound together with the St. Joseph river valley towns by steam boat travel and the commercial relationships this created. These little paddle wheel steamers also traveled northwards from the mouth of the St. Joe further up the lake coast in that direction too, so there were connections also with New Buffalo, and even St. Joseph and Benton Harbor further north. By the time A.A. came along, it was also easy to travel back and forth between Gary, Hammond, Michigan City, and South Bend on a commuter train called the South Shore Line that ran along that part of the coast of Lake Michigan.

In those days, the steel mills at Gary produced large quantities of metal for the automobile industry in Detroit. A towering cloud of reddish-brown smoke rose up into the air over the city, and was used by commercial airline pilots to guide them to Chicago, because it reached so high that it could be seen from an enormous distance. Although these fumes made the air sometimes smell foul, the steel mills brought prosperity to the city during those years.

Nick's List says that Harry F. of Hammond and Harry Roller came to meetings in South Bend and started the first group in Gary. Juanita P. says that the Hobart Speaker Group, still going in Hobart, Indiana (a few miles southeast of Gary on Indiana state highway 130) was originally founded by Harry Roller.

A letter to New York, preserved in the A.A. Archives there, from Paul P., dated August 21, 1947, said the Gary group was growing steadily: “From about five we have risen to fifteen regulars during last ten months, though some meetings may run up to 25.”

Some good information about early A.A. in this area came from Juanita P., who first came to A.A. in 1957 and has been sober since November 1958. “The young people of Gary started [a group] in my home in 1960. We started the Twelve Step House — the first one — in a three-room basement apartment on 10th Place in Gary.” She was the first woman member of the club. It is now known as the Wheeler Club, she says, having moved out of Gary into the small town of Wheeler, Indiana, several miles southeast of Gary.

Juanita says that Ken K. (now living in St. John, pop. 3,974) and Spike W. (now living in Merrillville, pop. 27,677) are active old-timers in A.A. in this part of northwestern Indiana who date back even before her.

**MICHIGAN CITY:** This northwestern Indiana city is only thirty-five miles west of South Bend and was more tightly connected to that city than to Gary or Hammond in the beginning. All three towns (Michigan City, Gary, and Hammond) were on the South Shore Line which ran its little commuter passenger trains back and forth between South Bend and downtown Chicago several times a day. Nick K.’s List says that two men named John were coming from out of town to the South Bend meetings by 1945, and later started a group in Michigan City. One was John W., and the last initial of the other one seems, in the handwritten manuscript, to have been either A, I, or O (Nick’s handwriting could sometimes be very ambiguous!).

**BREMEN:** Nick’s List mentions Dr. Asher S. coming from this town to South Bend meetings at the beginning.

**LaPORTE:** Nick K.'s List says that Art C., Bob G., and Joe R. were among the out-of-towners coming to South Bend A.A. meetings by 1944 or 1945, who subsequently helped found the LaPorte group. Nick said that Joe attended the weekend A.A. retreat which Father Ralph Pfau led in 1947, where the first of the Golden Books came out. In the New York A.A. Archives, the first correspondence from LaPorte was from a fourth man, someone named James P., dated May 15, 1945:

There is no group in LaPorte but South Bend is only 24 miles away and I have attended several meetings there . . . . If my stay here is of sufficient length I hope to start a group in LaPorte. The secretary at South Bend has given me several prospects and I am working on them.

In a later letter dated July 1, 1945, Jim indicated his success: "There are three very fine members and it looks like another grand AA outpost has been established." In addition, the New York A.A. Archives also preserves the following listing for LaPorte given in a piece of correspondence dated two years later on July 15, 1947, indicating that there was now a second group established in that town: "LaPorte Central Committee, Box 91, sec. J. W. R. Affiliated groups: Home Group #1 (Box 91), Home Group #2 (Box 91), Civic Group."

Nick's List says that "by 1945 many out of town persons came to So. Bend A.A.," and that some of them started groups later in other towns, among them a woman named Zora, whom he links with the town of LaPorte. We know that Zora (then Zora Hummel) was active in Elkhart A.A. in the early 1950's, so she was living in Elkhart at one point. Ellen Lantz says that Zora "moved back to LaPorte" however "when she and Jim [Hummel] got a divorce,"

which has to have been before 1961, and Pat Wilkie (who came in during 1958) associated Zora with LaPorte. Molly S. says that she only got to know Zora after this old timer was quite elderly, but that even then “she was a real pistol!”

**PLYMOUTH:** Nick’s List mentions three men who were coming to meetings in South Bend by c. 1944-45, who later started the A.A. group in Plymouth: Casey, Russ G., and a man named Art, with the last initial A, I, or (most probably) O, since the first listing for Plymouth, Indiana, in the A.A. Archives in New York was a letter dated November 15, 1946, from a person who gave the initials A. W. O’K. This was very likely the person Nick was referring to. The letter said “For your information we have started a group here at Plymouth with an initial five members.”

**WAKARUSA:** Nick K.’s List says that Carl L. was coming from Wakarusa to South Bend A.A. meetings by 1945, that he participated in setting up the first Alano Club in South Bend in 1945, and that he later started an A.A. group in Wakarusa.

### **Kosciusko County, Indiana: the southeastern edge of the St. Joseph River Valley region**

The beginnings of A.A. in Kosciusko County (along with portions of Wabash and Whitley Counties) was tied to two major early Indiana A.A. centers: they were situated southeast of South Bend, about halfway between that city and Fort Wayne, the other large focal point of A.A. activity in the northern half of Indiana. The first Fort Wayne A.A. group was started on December 7, 1941, a date they never forgot, because this was also the day on which the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. A.A. came to Fort Wayne from

Indianapolis. Then (as has already been noted) A.A. in South Bend began a little over a year later, on February 22, 1943, as a separate foundation which originally had no links or connection with Indianapolis or anywhere else in Indiana.

Frank N., the Northern Indiana A.A. Archivist from Syracuse, Indiana, put together most of the information on the beginnings of A.A. in this part of the state. The first A.A. group in Kosciusko County was started after a man named Fred Clark from North Webster had himself admitted to the Indiana Home in Indianapolis on February 19, 1946, for the purpose of “drying out.” While in residence he was introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous by visiting A.A. members and by attending the A.A. meetings held by these visitors twice per week. Even more importantly, Fred asked one of these visiting A.A. people, Doherty Sheerin, to become his sponsor. Dohr, one of the greatest leaders in early Indiana A.A., was the man who started A.A. in Indianapolis (the first meeting there was held on October 28, 1940).<sup>27</sup>

After Fred returned home to North Webster, for several months he stayed in regular touch with Dohr in Indianapolis and also went to an A.A. meeting in Fort Wayne every week. There were five other men from his part of Indiana also attending this Fort Wayne meeting (three from Warsaw and two from North Manchester), so Fred suggested to them that it might be wise to set up an A.A. meeting closer to home before winter set in. The snows of northern Indiana can frequently fall extraordinarily deep. In places where a valley or dip traps the blowing snow, one can encounter drifts ten or twenty feet deep covering a country road. Even when the highways are not totally blocked, driving can be very slow and treacherous, and someone trapped in an automobile stuck in a snow drift out on the rolling prairies can be in serious danger when the wind chill factor

drops the effective temperature down to thirty or forty degrees below zero Fahrenheit.

The six men from this part of Indiana held the first A.A. meeting in Kosciusko County at one member's home in Warsaw, Indiana, on September 30, 1946. Fred invited two Fort Wayne A.A. members and three South Bend A.A. members to attend the meeting and assist the new group. As the A.A. message spread, meetings were eventually established in all the major towns in the county, not only in Warsaw and North Webster, but also in places like Syracuse, Columbia City, and Milford. North Manchester and South Whitley are also considered part of that area, although a little further to the south and east. Many of the people there still feel deep connections to A.A. along the St. Joe River Valley (South Bend, Mishawaka, and Elkhart), although they also maintain relations with Fort Wayne A.A.

Warsaw has a population of 11,000, North Manchester has 6,400 people, Syracuse has 2,700 people, and so on — these are most of them typical midwestern small towns, surrounded by miles of rolling fields filled with corn and soy beans, and with the countryside around them dotted by numerous old two-story farm houses with huge barns — but the groups from that area stick together and travel back and forth, and what we find here is quality A.A. of the best sort. You can find sobriety, serenity, and real spirituality in these meetings, and some of the best people you will ever meet. That is the important thing: wherever A.A. spread through northern Indiana and southwestern Michigan, it brought new life and hope.

If you the reader start an A.A. group like one of these where you live, no matter which part of the globe you live in, you will be able to experience the same joy and fellowship, and will be able to understand why the good old timers whose stories we are telling in this book mean so much to us who are their spiritual children. They gave us life itself!

## **Part Three**

### **Ellen L., a Woman's Story**

## Chapter 6

# The Woman Who Couldn't Stop Crying

In the early years of A.A. in Elkhart, there were only three or four recovering women alcoholics who were extremely active and deeply involved. Ellen Lantz was one of these, and is remembered as someone who became one of the best sponsors for women alcoholics in the Elkhart area. She knew how to serve as a good spiritual guide, with love and genuine effectiveness. We are extremely fortunate that in 1985, shortly before her death, Stan E., the archives chairman for the Elkhart area A.A. groups, did a long interview with her in which he captured her reminiscences on tape (excerpts from this are marked \*\* below), and also secured a tape recording of a lead she had given a month or so before that (marked \* below).<sup>28</sup>

Ellen Lantz was born around 1921 and brought up in the vicinity of Constantine, a small town in southern Michigan near the Indiana border. She married shortly after she graduated from high school and had begun taking a few classes at Michigan State College. She was around nineteen at the time of her marriage. She and her new husband left the farming life and moved a few miles away, to the town of Niles, which is right on the Michigan border just a few minutes drive north of South Bend on U.S. 31.

\* I want to go back a little. At the beginning of my life, I was the third child of four, I was a farmer's daughter. I went to a small school. I started in the same school and graduated in the same school. Now you go to all different schools in the city, but in a little town it's all one school, and that's what I did. I had a very normal childhood. I cannot blame my parents for anything that happened to me. I was very good in school, and I don't mean to brag about that, because . . . even knowledge can be taken away from you if it's God's will. I'll talk about that later.

I was an honor graduate, I earned a scholarship, and I did go for part-time on my scholarship at Michigan State College. However, I met a young man, and there went the college education! I "continued my education" in house-keeping and kindergarten. We were married in March 3, 1940, and we had a real good life. From the farm we went into Niles, Michigan, and we had a good job and we began to taste the good life, we thought.

And so, on my nineteenth birthday — I was nineteen and a half — I was introduced to my first alcoholic beverage. My husband's brother came from Grand Rapids, and brought his girlfriend and we thought we'd have a little party. So we had a little party. By that time, I'd had my first child too by the way. She was about six months old at the time.

And I picked up this drink, and it was just beer. Everybody said, "That won't hurt you." So I had two beers that night. The next morning, my husband had to stay home from work to take care of the baby, because I couldn't get up! My head was like this [holding her hands up wide apart], and I was actually physically sick. And I remember holding my head and saying to him, "Never again, O my God, don't ever let me do that again." I was absolutely sick — on two beers!

So I remembered that for a while. And then we had a change of scenery, we moved to Elkhart. And he became a city bus driver there, and I became a housewife completely. And by that time I was pregnant for my second child. We had Walter in August, after we'd moved here in November. And in the meantime, this group of people that we'd started to run with were all party people. So we had parties, and I kept saying, "No, I don't want anything to drink" whenever we had a party, or had gone to a party. I said, "I have to drive home; Leon's the drinker in our family." So I refused to drink at that time.

Well, on my twenty-first birthday, they insisted I have a drink. And of course by that time, I was a little worn down — they didn't have to persuade me too heavily to take that drink. Well, I took that drink that night, and then I took another one that night, and I took another one that night, and by midnight I was out of it, I was in a blackout. I don't remember anything, and I don't remember anything for a day and a half after that.

So my experience with alcohol was physically and mentally disruptive then. I could not handle liquor from the very word go. I never had any good times with liquor, but I kept thinking, "Everybody else does, I've got to drink, I've got to see why I'm not having a good time."

This kept [up and] continued for about two and a half years, and we kept having these parties. But after that blackout, I decided I wasn't going to drink again, and it would last about three or four months, and then I would decide, "I'll try it again."

Alcoholics, with their desperate need to feel as though they "belong" and can really be "one of the crowd," will feel a tremendous peer pressure to drink when they are socializing with other people who are drinking, even if the alcohol is clearly having a

very bad effect on them. Alcoholics above all want to keep up a good public face, and cannot stand being caught in a position where it might look like they were unsophisticated, or that they were wimps. The young men and women with whom Ellen and her husband regularly partied insisted that she drink as a kind of twenty-first birthday “coming of adulthood” ritual. For young people, drinking alcohol can be a potent gesture of bravado, a major symbol of being “adult” and “grownup,” and not a sissy, scared little child any longer.

But on her twenty-first birthday, Ellen discovered something else: if she drank enough, she went into a blackout, and like many an alcoholic, she found out that in this way alcohol could bring you *total oblivion*. It was a way to “drown yourself” for a while in a bottle, a “little suicide.” But it only took her five years to arrive at the brink of the real thing, looking down at the St. Joseph river and preparing to throw herself in and drown for real.

The Second World War was going on, and Ellen’s husband went into the navy in 1944. She was about twenty-three, with two small children, a girl and a boy. She discovered that his absence provided a marvelous opportunity for a regular, secret, once-a-month plunge into total alcoholic oblivion, without parents, husband, or children to see her descent into the drunken blackout. Down deep, regardless of any surface bluster they may erect, practicing alcoholics feel a deep shame about the way they drink — they try to do it privately, secretly, or covertly; they hide bottles; if nothing else, they are guaranteed to lie if someone else asks them pointedly how much they drink, and they set the amount much lower than they know they really drink.

\* In 1944 — in June of 1944 — my husband left for the navy. And my mother didn’t like the idea of her “little girl”

being down here in this big city with two children, all by herself, so she and my father suggested that we move — the children and I — move back to Constantine with them, and rent our house that we had purchased here. So that was what we did.

Now, in the meantime, all these friends of ours, the husbands were leaving too, and every time somebody left, we had to have a party. Well by this time, I was getting to be a good party-goer, and so, we had parties.

My husband left for the service, and I went to Constantine. Well, we had this little house back here in Elkhart, and that gave me a contact. So while he was out fighting the war, I was coming back every month to take care of the business in Elkhart. And of course, I always found those friends that still partied, and so I'd party every month. My mother could never understand why I never got home on Sunday, it was always Monday! So I did get back, and this continued, and every time Leon had a furlough, we would have a party. We'd come to Elkhart . . . to see our friends, and we would drink. His drinking was getting almost as bad as mine, although he could handle it much better.

Her husband's return from the war put an end to the scheduled, once-a-month covert binges. This jolted her enough to provide a brief flash of conscious recognition — and shame — at what she was doing with her drinking. And so, typically of alcoholics, she made an even more fervent promise to herself, that “never again” would she degrade herself like that with liquor.

As with eating disorders, alcoholism can sometimes play itself out in a repeated two-part cycle, with a binge phase followed by a control phase. The control phase is actually as sick, distorted, and neurotic as the binge phase, and is merely a psychological preparation for the next binge. The A.A. program strongly insists

that members talk only about staying sober today — for the twenty-four hours that we are now going through — because the attempt at swearing mighty oaths that we will never drink again, and trying to do that by some enormous act of will power, and by practicing superhuman control, is just bouncing over into the guilt-ridden control phase of the cycle. Our behavior during this part of the cycle will make our internal tensions and pressures start building up until the pressure gets too great, and then another bout of uncontrolled drinking will inevitably follow in a necessary cause-effect sequence. If we try to tie down the steam escape valve on a pressure cooker by brute force, it will only be a matter of time until the pressure cooker explodes in our faces. We can only obtain good sobriety by getting out of this neurotic cycle totally, which means getting out of both parts of the cycle.

\* Anyway, the war was over and he came home. And when he came home, we were so happy that he was able to come home, and I made a vow then, when he came home, that life was gonna be a little different, that were gonna settle down and be parents, and enjoy that little home we had. Well, that lasted. . . .

I guess you got the idea that periodically — regardless of what I said, that I wasn't gonna drink — periodically I drank. Well, periodically, I still drank after I had said this. And I began to keep on drinking, every three or four months, and every three or four months it was just plain hell, because he had to stop everything he was doing to take care of the family. Because every time I got drunk, it was two or three days at a time. And I would be sick — so deathly sick.

The *powerlessness* over alcohol which the *first part* of the first step talks about was already apparent in Ellen's life. Now the

problem talked about in the *second part* of the first step reared its head: the descent into total *unmanageability*.

\* So in the meantime we purchased another home, sold the little one we had, and we thought, “Boy, we’re right on top of the world!” Leon started a business, he had a filling station out on Franklin Street<sup>29</sup> — and previously when I was going to school I was planning to be a secretary, and my knowledge of bookkeeping was few and far between really, but I did that a little — [so] he decided I could keep the books in that business.

Well, that was a mistake! Because I had my hand in the till to buy the liquor. In the meantime, I would go over at night, I’d get a babysitter, and I’d go over at night, and do the bookwork, and while I was gone in the daytime, he’d get somebody to help him, and he’d hit the till too. So we were both hitting the till. And so it came to that September 7th, 1947 — seven years, we’d been married seven years — well, I’ve got to go back a little bit. On March 3rd of that year, it was so bad that I filed for a divorce. Well, needless to say, that didn’t go through. We decided we’d try it again.

\*\* [But I had] sued for a divorce. And the attorney that I had — I did this before I came into A.A., on our seventh wedding anniversary, I sued for divorce — and the attorney that I sued with was the one that came to help me that night [when I finally called A.A.] I’ve always thought that was such a coincidence, because he knew I had a problem then, but couldn’t say anything as an attorney, because he was representing me, you know. But he figured that there had to be something behind it. And we dropped the divorce, of course, when I got sober.

Alcoholism is a progressive disease: over the long haul, the symptoms and effects only get worse, never better. In Ellen’s case,

what finally caused her to hit bottom was looking in an empty cash drawer and realizing that all their dreams of being successful business-owners were breaking up on the reefs of reality. It was 11:30 at night (almost midnight) on the evening of September 7, 1947, she said on the tape recording of her reminiscences, when she became suicidal and decided to go out into the night and drown herself in the cold waters of the St. Joseph river where it flowed through that part of Elkhart. The filling station was just south of the river, on Franklin Street just three blocks north of Indiana Avenue, not far from the center of town. Snatched back from the dark river at the last moment, she finally became so desperate that she called the phone number she had been given for an A.A. contact three weeks earlier. She was around twenty-six years old at the time.

\* And in September 7th, 1947, I went over to the filling station to do the books, and I discovered that there wasn't even enough in that till to pay for the gas that was coming the next day. Before I got there though, I had a stop and got a bottle. And I started to drink, and then I started to fuss, we started to fight, and I got so deathly sick, I just got in my car, and I said, "What the hell's the use?"

My mind was completely befogged. And I started out Indiana Avenue to the river, and he right after me. And he got to me, and he said, "This is a hell of a mess! Now you get back there, and we'll talk this over another time." He was afraid I was gonna jump in the river, and I knew that was what I was planning to do. He got me back to the filling station, and he said, "To hell with it!" and he took off.

Well, the fellow that was doing the filling station said, "Ellen, wasn't Bud Brandon in here the other night?" I can say his name now, he's gone. "And didn't he tell you that

if you ever needed help, you should call him?” And I said, “Yes, I really need help. Leon’s in a bad way!” [*Laughter*]

\*\* I felt my *husband* was having [the] drinking problem [when] I called A.A. I got the phone number for A.A. through a friend. We had a business in Elkhart, and he used to come every week and have his car done. And he could see that there was a drinking problem there, but I thought, when he gave me that number to call his father “if it got too bad,” that he meant for me to call on my husband, not me. I didn’t think the problem was mine.

\* So I had on a suit that I had put that number in the pocket of three weeks before, and fortunately for me, I hadn’t cleaned the pocket, because there was that phone number. So I called. I couldn’t remember what his name was [if you had asked me], I just knew he was a customer, and that he paid well, you know, when he’d come in. That’s how I knew about him.

Repeatedly, in recounting the tale of how they found the program, A.A. people tell about the way some rather strange set of apparently accidental occurrences happened in exactly the right sequence, and at exactly the right time and place, to bring them to where they were supposed to be. A sceptic would insist that these were merely “coincidences,” and there is no point in arguing with them about that, because looked at one at a time, in isolation from what went before and came afterward, there is no rational way of demonstrating that they were anything else but pure lucky chance.

Many recovering people in A.A. believe, however, that (a) you just run into entirely too many of these apparent “coincidences” in the life of recovery, and (b) if you assume instead that they are produced by the providential care of a loving God in order to lead us, by his grace, to where he knows we need to be, you will always find at the pragmatic level that your life just keeps getting better and

better. And contrariwise, if you keep on arguing that they are the product only of blind chance in a mechanical and uncaring universe, your life demonstrably, at the pragmatic level, seems to make no real forward progress.

\*\* And I called, and I told them “They just had to come and talk to my husband, he was a mess. And I just couldn’t live like that any longer.”

\* I called that number, and by this time it was getting close to twelve o’clock [midnight], and I was in a crying jag. Now if you ever saw anything prettier than a crying, drunken woman, let me know! *[Laughter]* But these two — he said, “Just a minute Ellen, I’ll be right there.” And I said “Right there, what do you mean, right there?” “Well,” he said, “I’m only about fifteen minutes from your station.” I said, “O.K., I’ll wait.” But I said it reluctantly, and then I cried some more.

\*\* [When] he said, “Stay tight, somebody’ll be there in a few minutes,” I didn’t realize that he only lived about ten minutes away, or [I probably] wouldn’t have called quite so quickly. But in ten minutes or so, he was there, and a few minutes later, the second man came. Now at that time, there were approximately three girls in A.A., and only one of them was active, as far as making twelfth step calls, and that was — if you have heard the tape of Ed P[ike], one was his wife Bobby — and she was the active one.

\* He got a hold of another man . . . and they came over together. It’s probably a good thing they did, too, because if I’d a’ just had one of them to handle, I probably could a’ made it pretty good. *[Laughter from the women present]* But two of ’em, that was different.

The other A.A. contact he brought with him was Willard C., the attorney who was one of the founding figures of Elkhart A.A.

Although Willard later went back to drinking at the end of his life, he not only played an important role in starting the Elkhart program, he made the crucial twelfth-step call here which brought Ellen L. into the program. Willard was a truly tragic figure, because although he could not ultimately stay sober himself for the long haul, he not only acted as the agent of God's grace in helping bring both Ellen Lantz and Ed Pike into the program, but also (by serving as a mainstay of the Elkhart A.A. group in its crucial formative years) helped create the program that was to save the lives of his young attorney grandson and the grandson's wife some years later.

\*\* The two men that came to call was an attorney here in Elkhart, Willard C., and a conductor on the railroad, Earl Brandon. Earl Brandon is the one that I called, and it was his son who had given me the number. They kidded me many times over, because I was a crying alcoholic, I was on a crying jag — and how many handkerchiefs they had to furnish me that night, to dry the tears!

\* They used to kid me [by asking me] which handkerchief I used the most to cry that night! But I told them my husband really needed help, that I had to have some help with him, because this was just getting too much for me.

They explained to me a little about the program, but they realized, in their good way, that I wasn't really receptive to what they were gonna say about Alcoholics Anonymous. So they just gave me a very brief outline of it, and then they said, "Maybe he won't want to come. But why don't you try it. You probably might get something out of it." And I thought, "Well, if that's gonna help, I'll try it."

\*\* They took me home — Leon hadn't come back yet — so they took me home, and told me that the next day they would send two other people out to see me and talk to me. We were living in Dunlap at the time, and there was no bus

service, so I couldn't get anywhere, and I didn't drive, I'd lost my driver's license.

\* They told me that the next day there would be a man and lady out to see me, that the lady was an alcoholic, and they had been in the group, at that time, for about six months. So the next morning, with this great big head again . . . . \*\* Ed Pike and his wife Bobby came to call on me, and from that time on the association between Ed and his wife and myself was a great boon to my sobriety.

\* I left out a very important part: All this time at the filling station, I no longer had this happy home. We lost that home, and we had moved out to Dunlap, in a two-car garage. And this two-car garage we fixed up as living quarters. I got to tell you this, this is really cute. We took both of us to fix this up, day and night, a little bit at a time, and we had to drive a well. I got to tell this, because here we are, both with sledge hammers, driving this well with two bottles of liquor. First he'd take a drink, and then I'd take a drink, and then I'd hit and then he'd hit. But we got the well down, and we got water.

But we still didn't have bathroom facilities, and I looked around the living room, and my folks had an old wardrobe that they had used many, many years ago — it was probably a hundred years old — when we decided that would make good bathroom facilities out there in the back by the turnip field. So it was one of those where you just walk in and walk back out — or *back in* and walk out. [*Laughter*] And so, we had come down quite a bit with our drinking by that time.

I often think about, when Bobby and Ed [Pike] come out there, what she *must* have thought, because you could see through the cracks in that house, you could see air anywhere you looked, and we had put an old awning down, and there were the bunk beds just as you come in the door, for the children. It was a mess! From a six-room house to

this little bit of thing. And that house [we lost] was *beautiful*, I loved it, it was out on Pleasant Plain.

When alcoholics come into A.A., they find that the other A.A. people serve as a *non-shaming mirror* in which they can start to see clearly, for the first time, who they really are and where they have really gotten to. Other people had been in Ellen's house before that point and seen the depths to which she had fallen, but the inner shame she felt was so great that she could not admit to herself what they must have been seeing and thinking. She had to blank it all out because it hurt too much to look at. For some reason, in the presence of a fellow alcoholic who is following the recovery program, it may hurt a great deal and be terribly frightening to look at the humiliating and shameful things that we have gotten into, but the divine grace comes from somewhere to give us the strength to at least continue looking at them and fully acknowledging to ourselves that they are there. We need that, because it is the truth that ultimately sets us free.

The sunlight of the spirit, mirrored in the loving faces of the other people in A.A., then begins to heal the pain. *Humiliation is turned into HUMILITY*, which is a divine virtue. Now Ellen could stand in front of a group of people and tell it the way it really happened — not bragging about it and throwing it into people's faces as an act of aggression — but telling it with a full sense of the sorrowful circumstances into which her life had fallen at that point. On the other hand, she was not embarrassed by it any more, or filled any longer with gnawing shame.

\* Anyway . . . Ed and Bobby came out, and talked to me.

\*\* I told them that I didn't think it was me, that it was Leon, and they told me, "Let's let you try it. *You* try it."

They could see that the problem was resting within me, but I couldn't.

\* [Bobby particularly encouraged me to go to the meetings myself.] "You know, Ellen, I think maybe you should go to A.A. with me," she said, "I've found that it's so good. I know Ed does all the drinking in our place, and I do some," but she says, "I just know that you'll get as much out of it as I have. I haven't had a drink for six months!" And I thought, "Boy, that sounds good! I think I can handle that! I'll help Leon with that." *[Laughter]*

\*\* Well, for four days they came out, day after day, to help me, because we didn't have any treatment centers, without it costing a fortune, and insurance was a thing that you didn't carry then, to pay for these sort of treatments. As a matter of fact, they thought it was self-inflicted, and so it wasn't covered if you did have insurance. And the closest place for treatment was in Chicago, and with two young children, there was certainly no way that I was gonna be able to go to Chicago and be treated. I might add too, that my husband and I lost our business, and we lost our home, and all through my drinking. And it was pretty rough to come back on the road [to recovery].

They came out every day for, oh, I'd say a week, and helped me struggle through those d.t.'s and all the shakes and everything, I mean, when you talk about being dedicated, they were! — Bobby and Ed and . . . Micky. Micky Nance and Bobby would come out, and then Martha Wambaugh — and those were the only three girls in A.A. till I came in — and they would take turns coming out and sitting with me. That lasted about six weeks before I got on my feet enough to go to a meeting.

\* So I started to go to A.A. Now, back then — by that time we'd lost our cars too, I forgot to tell you that. My husband was driving trucks, so a car wasn't essential. But I had to go out on the highway and hitch a ride on the bus to

come into Elkhart, or to go to Goshen to get my groceries. So, I would hitch a bus, and go into Elkhart for a meeting. Then we discovered that there was a man from Goshen coming [Dean Barnhardt], so he would stop and pick me up, and that helped a lot, I didn't have to pay a baby sitter for such a long time, because it took quite a while to get by bus, you know, and there's a lot of taverns between here and Dunlap. [*Laughter*] We lived out there in those circumstances for about a year and a half, and in that year and a half I kept coming to A.A., I kept going to meetings.

We had open meetings at St. John's at that time, and one of the first dances that they had down there, one of the first Thanksgiving things that we had down there — now you want to remember that A.A. was probably about four years old in Elkhart at that time — and one of the first ones I went to, I was all dressed up, this was after I'd been sober for a little bit, and the first lady I run into was the wife of an alcoholic. And she said to me, "Was your mother Lela Hellam," and I said "Yes," and she said, "Well, I'm her little girlfriend that went to school with her." And I thought, "Oh, my God, what's Mom gonna say now!" But you know, she never did disclose that I was in A.A., regardless of the many times that my mother and she got together after that.

But I myself did disclose it to my mother in very short time. It didn't matter, she knew something was wrong. They had come down when we were living on Pleasant Plain many, many times, and found me in those — they were ready to take my family away from me. They were ready to put me in an institution.

\*\* [So anyway], the first open A.A. meeting I went to was down to the St. John's Episcopal Church, and I walk in, and there is my mother's girlfriend from years ago, and her husband is an alcoholic, and again [as with Ed and Bobby], the ties became real close.

And I got a great deal of help from an Al-Anon as well. Of course, Al-Anon wasn't established then, but the alcoholics' wives treated us girls just as though we were one of them, they didn't [exclude us from their group], we felt comfortable around them.

In early A.A., alcoholics and their families went about recovering together, which is the right way to do it. Those who drink and those who do not can help each other. We must remember how grateful the struggling alcoholics in early Akron A.A. were to Dr. Bob's wife Anne, who was not an alcoholic herself, but was a very wise and deeply spiritual woman. They often went to the house to talk with Anne just as much as they went to talk with Dr. Bob. Attempting to rigidly separate A.A.'s and Al-Anons and trying to put an unbreachable wall between them is destructive and weakening to both fellowships.

It was the beginning of September when Ellen Lantz called A.A. for the first time. In October of that same year (1947), she had gall bladder surgery, and a well-meaning but gravely ill-informed doctor encouraged her to believe that she had drunk like she did only to relieve the pain of gall bladder attacks. So in the spring of 1948 she went back out again on a brief binge:

\* Shortly after I came into the program, I had a serious operation. And I had to have my parents keep my two children while I recuperated. I thank God that I had A.A. at that time. I thank God that Bobby and Eddie [Pike] and all those A.A. people were around to help me. Because I know, that had I been left on my own, I would've drank myself into oblivion, until I was insane, or dead.

I remember telling my doctor that I was having an alcohol problem. Now you want to remember that I came into A.A. thinking it was my husband's [problem], I had

never completely given up [and admitted] that it was *my* illness, *my* disease. So when I told the doctor this, he said, “Ellen, it was just because, you know, when you drank, you passed out, and by morning the pain was all gone.” I had a gall bladder surgery, and when I got those gall bladder attacks, I would drink, and then, when I’d come to, the pain naturally was gone, because I hadn’t done anything to upset it — except drink, and let it float a little! [*Laughter*]

\*\* [So when] the doctor convinced me that I wasn’t an alcoholic, that the only reason I drank was because it got rid of the pain . . . those were just the words I wanted to hear! Heh, heh! But nevertheless, I stayed with the girls [from A.A.], and they came out and helped me.

And it was in the spring, and I began to feel better, and I could get out on my own, and I went out and drank again. That was a very short duration, because I got scared again, and called Bobby right away, and she didn’t hesitate a minute, was right there to help me, and Micky the same way.

Around 1949, she and her husband and two children moved out of the tiny place in Dunlap and came back to Elkhart.<sup>30</sup> Once back in Elkhart, in 1949 she went out again on another short binge.

\*\* Then we moved into Elkhart again [and] my children went to school here. And it was 1949, I believe, yeah, I went out again, and I remember Ed Pike telling me that I really wanted to, that it wasn’t a slip, that I really wanted to get drunk or I wouldn’t a’ done it, and that made me angry. So I went out to prove to him he was wrong.

But his wife came to my defense, and we got together again, and we studied A.A., and Father John Doe was writing things about that time, and we’d study all his books together. We got *Sermon on the Mount*, from Emmet Fox, and we studied that very thoroughly. She just . . . there was

no letup on all the good things that we could do together. And so I began to just gradually go back to recovery from the disease.

Early A.A. people always read a variety of books to help them stay sober and grow spiritually. In the St. Joseph river valley, the Golden Books written by the Indiana priest Ralph Pfau (an A.A. member who published them under the pseudonym of “Father John Doe”) were always extremely important and still are today. *The Sermon on the Mount*, written in 1934 by a New Thought teacher named Emmet Fox, is also still recommended today in the South Bend-Mishawaka-Elkhart area for newcomers who are having difficulty with the spiritual aspects of the program.

On March 27, 1951, Ellen came to from her last drunken blackout. She was around thirty years old now, and had been attending A.A. meetings for three and a half years. This was her third relapse. She had gone out on similar brief binges, drinking to blackout, in the spring of 1948 and in 1949. Why was the program apparently not being successful for her? It was at that point that Zora, another well-known woman in early A.A. in the area, forced Ellen to confront the basic inner strategy she had been using to avoid having to honestly work the program. Ellen had been blaming and criticizing and attacking other people but steadfastly refusing to look at *herself* and her own attitudes and behavior. She had been taking other people’s inventories — especially her husband Leon’s — instead of taking her own.

\* ELLEN: I continued to stay sober for about a year. I knew Leon had a drinking problem — I admitted that — and I took the steps for him. I knew God was gonna have to help him. And I went through [them all]. The third step, I asked God to help him, myself, because he was still — all

this time I'm going to A.A. and trying to stay sober — he's still drinking. So I just knew he had the problem. So, fourth step, I took his inventory, I'd been doing that a long time! *[Laughter]* And the fifth step, I was *glad* to tell everybody about him. *[Laughter]* And the sixth step, I was willing to give it to God, because I couldn't handle it, I tried to control it all that time. And finally it come to the seventh step, humbly asked God to remove his shortcomings. And there was no way I could do that, I just couldn't get humble enough to ask God to remove 'em all, he had so many! *[Laughter]*

\*\* And it was — hmm? — March 27, 1951 when I had my final bout with alcoholism, active alcoholism. In 1951, that spring of '51, my children were down at my folks in Michigan for their spring vacation.

\* *[This was after]* we had moved back into Elkhart, and he had gotten another job, which was nice. And that left me at home nights.

\*\* And it was just two days past my husband's birthday, and he had gone out on the road for a week, and I thought, "Oh goody!" It was a *planned* drunk — but the drunk that followed was not planned, because I was so sick and so broken when it was over with.

\* *[It was]* just after his . . . birthday party — we had to have a birthday party, of course. He went out on the road . . . and I do not recall what happened from the time he left the house (and I was pretty well gone when he left) . . . I have no recollection of what happened for two days. I come to about the 27th, I call it the 27th of March, I'm not too sure of the dates *[chuckling]*.

I came to, and I was sitting in this rocking chair in my dining room, looking out the window, I couldn't get my body or my mind together, everything was a total mess, the house was a total shambles. I knew I'd had a party, you could tell that. But my children were gone, they'd gone for

spring vacation down to my mother's, and that gave me license to party. I remember, at the time, Bobby was not too well, and I couldn't walk over to see her (she lived not too far from me), but I remember finally coming to, and saying, "Oh God, if you'll just help *me*, that's all I want, *just help ME.*"

\*\* [Since Bobby wasn't available] I had to go over to Zora's. By this time we had gotten several women in and out. But the one that stayed was Zora.

STAN E.: Zora. This is the other A.A. lady?

ELLEN: Uh huh.

STAN E.: Zora who?

ELLEN: Zora Hummel at that time, she married Jim Hummel. And he was in A.A. too.

\* And I thought, "for the first time I'm admitting it's me." And I got in my coat, and I got to tell you this, because I know how ridiculous I must have looked. We had heels about that high then, I think they were about three-inch spikes, weren't they Betty? And I had this beautiful fur coat, and we lived down on Monroe St., which is off Middlebury, and Bobby and Ed lived over on St. Joe Street.

[So I ended up at Zora's house. She told me, "Take] some paper. You go in my bedroom, you shut the door, and you start your fourth step and get it done — *right* this time. Not Leon's, *yours.*" I said, "O.K." And I was sick, I was really sick — my stomach, and — oh, what a mess!

I went in there, but you know, I said to God, "Please help me." And God did that for me. Because, when I started to write that inventory, I couldn't write fast enough. It was just like my whole darn life and everything that I had ever done that bothered me was there on the surface for me to pick up, and do something about.

For all practicing alcoholics, at the heart of their mindset is a desperate attempt up at the surface level to convince themselves that

all their problems are caused by what certain other people are thinking or doing. But this is always held in tension with a deep inner fear — which they do not want to admit consciously — that it is actually totally their own fault, and that this is so because they are *no good at all*. Or if they cannot blame their problems on other human beings, they will try to blame them on God. “God hated me and did me wrong,” or at least, “God didn’t care about *me*.” So the first thing that has to be done in getting alcoholics to write a genuine fourth step, is to get them to stop fixating on what they think other people did or didn’t do, and on what they imagine God did or didn’t do. And then the second thing that has to be done is to keep these alcoholics from going overboard the other direction. It is not a matter of *blaming* myself, and heaping coals of fire on my head, and seeing myself as a hopeless, total failure, but a matter simply of seeing what role I played in helping create these problems, or how I made things worse by reacting to them in the wrong kind of way. And the whole purpose of that is to learn a few simple things — it is never very complicated — about how to react and respond differently to the world, which is something that anyone can learn to do, with the aid of the great Healing Power whom we meet in the twelve step program.

Resentment is the first thing that has to be looked at in making a fourth step inventory, because *resentment is the number one killer of alcoholics*. Until alcoholics start working on their resentments and purging this poison from their systems, they will not be able to stay sober for long. So, regardless of what someone else did to me, if I develop an obsessive resentment which I cannot let go of — days, weeks, months, even years later — a resentment which continues to fester and be revisited over and over in my head whenever my mind wanders that direction, then in the fourth step I need to figure out what in *my* character allowed that event to get such a poisonous hold

on me. Why could I not just feel the anger at the time it happened, but deal with it appropriately, and then lay it aside and move on with my life in as positive a direction as possible?

Fear is the other major issue. So in a good fourth step the same thing has to be done with the obsessive fears which paralyze me, or drive me to irrational and destructive behavior, over and over again, in what is essentially the same fundamental pattern each time. What in my character makes certain specific kinds of fear turn inside my head into something (at the feeling level) which seems more like a monster from a little child's nightmare, with teeth and claws and long green ears and bristling purple fur? Or, what in my character makes me put myself, over and over again, in situations where this particular kind of fear (or resentment) will inevitably seize hold?

Alcoholics coming into the A.A. program dread doing a genuine fourth step with such horror because they see it initially only as an exercise in *assessing blame*. "If I can successfully cast the blame on someone or something else, then you can't blame me, see!" But down deep, alcoholics believe that the blame, the shame, the total condemnation for being inherently flawed and rotten, lies totally on them.

The A.A. Big Book, however, sets out the process, NOT as an exercise in blame-throwing, but as simply *analogous to a businessman making a prudent inventory every once in a while, of which parts of his business operation are going well and which parts need some retailoring or restructuring or repair*. The fourth step is intended to be like an automobile mechanic checking out a nice car that is somehow not running quite right, and figuring out which part is clogged up with gunk, or which screw needs readjusting, or whatever. The fourth step is not a *negative* exercise in casting blame, but a *positive* exercise in figuring out how to get things working right again.

Nevertheless, looking consciously and deliberately for the first time, with eyes wide open, at my own responsibility for the bitter, poisonous, paralyzing, *intolerable part* of my own inner misery, is a traumatic experience. That is why the fourth step has to be followed quickly by the cleansing experience of the fifth step. When alcoholics go into this fifth step, they still will not have gotten completely out of the *blaming and shaming mode*. That is why it always takes such a tremendous amount of courage to make that fifth step. Alcoholics are always convinced at one level that they have done the unpardonably shameful, and that the people to whom they recite their fifth step will react with unmitigated horror and repulsion, and will reject them totally, completely, and permanently, right on the spot. Alcoholics feel absolutely *sick inside* as they begin to tell their full tale to the other person.

If alcoholics choose someone even moderately decent with whom to make their fifth step, what will happen is something they could never even have imagined or predicted at all, because it will be something totally new in their experience. You cannot describe it to someone who has not done it, because the other person will not be able to relate it to anything at all in his previous experience. It will be like the opening of a magic door. The alcoholic will find himself setting foot for the first time on what (for him) is *terra nova*: a new land, a new world, a totally different way of looking at everything that has happened in his past, and out of that, a totally new vision of his own future possibilities.

\* I got the list made out, and I went out the door, and Zora was at the sink doing dishes. She said, "What are you going to do now?" I said, "I'm going over to the pastor's house," which was over on Benham Avenue.

Well, needless to say, I hadn't been to church for several years, because I wasn't going to be "a hypocrite"! Anyway,

when I got to the door, and I knocked on the door, it was not our pastor . . . . while I was gone, they had changed pastors. I told him who I was, I was a “church member” (quote . . . quote!), and what I was there for. He said, “Please come in.”

I took my fifth step, I’m glad I had an understanding person to do it with. When I walked out of that [parsonage] . . . . We kneeled, we had our prayer, he asked for help to help me, because I was the first person he’d ever had this kind of a contact with. He knew absolutely nothing about our program, he knew absolutely nothing about alcohol, the addiction of alcohol, so he asked for prayers for himself as well as for me, to understand me. So I came out of that parsonage, and I felt like a million dollars.

## Chapter 7

# The Elkhart A.A. Program

After coming to from her last drunk on March 27, 1951, Ellen Lantz began to work the program seriously, to work it for *herself* instead of working it for (and about) someone else, and was finally able to stay continuously sober.<sup>31</sup>

ELLEN: And starting in 1951, then, my life really turned around. Zora would come over — her husband worked nights, Leon was gone on the truck at night, and I had two children, she didn't have any — she'd come over to my house while her husband worked. He worked down at Federal Press, and worked from three to eleven, so she would come over about 5:30, and we'd have lunch, and we'd get the children ready, and they'd go to bed, and then we'd sit and talk A.A., night after night after night, and we'd crochet, and our friendship just really developed.

In the meantime, Bobby and Ed had moved away where I couldn't get over to their house so much, but our phones were kept busy between the three of us. We had a good phone connection!

Like numerous other people from all over the surrounding area, Ellen drove in to South Bend at one point to attend the famous

classes for beginners in A.A., with Ken M.'s classes as the special drawing card:

ELLEN: Oh, my first classes, though, before this, before we got that far. When I first came in, in the mid-50's, I went to South Bend, and . . . Kenneth Merrill gave 'em to us, and he gave me this, and I've always kept it. But he held the classes, and his classes, he divided it, they were in three. They took all the steps in three classes, and he divided it [so] Class One was strictly the first step alone, Class Two was on all the steps dealing with God and . . .

STAN: You did a step study?

ELLEN: . . . dealing with self, and the others were, well, how you dealt with God and yourself and another human being. But he did them all in three classes, and they were two- and three-hour classes. I know lots of times, you didn't get home till midnight.

STAN: It was like a step study, more or less?

ELLEN: Uh huh, uh huh. And I really got an awful lot out of that.

Ellen described the way they held their early A.A. meetings in Elkhart: the closed meetings, which met in rotating fashion in the homes of the members, and the once-a-week open meeting at St. John's Episcopal Church in Elkhart on Saturday nights (the old building, not the modern one which was built to replace it later on, which you see today).

ELLEN: We met in the homes. That's another thing, there weren't any meeting halls. The only meeting hall was at St. John's Episcopal on Saturday. We met in the homes and we had established — by 1954, we'd established three meetings a week. We had a Tuesday night, Wednesday

night, and Thursday night meeting, other than the one on Saturday at St. John's.

STAN: Excuse me. St. John's, where was it located?

ELLEN: On Third and Marion, uh, on Third and Lexington.

STAN: That's . . . where it's at today?

ELLEN: Yeah, St. John's Episcopal. It isn't the one where we go to out there now, O.K.

Ellen accidentally spilled some coffee on her rug while refilling a cup, then went on to talk about the closed meetings, including how they were financed, and what they used for readings.

ELLEN: That's what I said the other night, when we were talking . . . oh oh, that was a real wide one, wasn't it! . . . get my carpet mopped dry . . . that's what I said the other night, when we said dollar donations. We gave a dollar donation right from the very beginning. 'Cause we paid that for liquor, they always said: if you could afford a bottle of liquor you could afford a buck. Course sometimes when you had to pay a baby sitter, that got kind a' hard. But then again, you only went to two meetings a week. You went to your regular meeting, and you went to St. John's on Saturday night. That was the open speaker meeting. And the other one was closed.

And we always appointed . . . every week they appointed someone to take the meeting the next week. So you had a chance to think what you wanted to talk about, and go, and you could pick up your material and read the things that you thought were important to you. And maybe they would be important to somebody else, and it would follow with the discussion. But they always read something every meeting. And out of the *Grapevine*. They always kept the *Grapevines*. And, oh also we got the *Bar-less*, I've

got some old, old *Bar-less* magazines, and old, old *Grapevines*.

The *Grapevine* was the magazine published out of A.A. headquarters in New York city. The prisoners who had been helped so much by the A.A. prison program had also started a magazine, called *Bar-less* (a nice little double pun), and in a sense were repaying those who had come out to them in the prison by providing them with some useful material suitable for discussion at meetings.

A.A. was still a very small movement in Elkhart in the 1950's compared to now, fifty years later — there were only four meetings a week (one open and three closed discussion meetings) as contrasted to around a hundred a week in Elkhart and the surrounding area today — but at the time, it felt like A.A. had become huge.

In 1954, there was established a writing service, since there were so many meetings — *we* thought that was a lot of meetings [back in those days]. We had three a week: there was Tuesday nights, my night was Wednesday night, and Thursday night. Bobby's night was Wednesday night, we always went together.

STAN: These are at all the houses? . . . Wednesday it was at your house?

ELLEN: No, no. It would rotate.

STAN: Oh, I see.

ELLEN: Everybody in the group would hold it, the next meeting. Well, if you missed a meeting, then you didn't know where it was gonna be the next week. So we devised a plan, we sent postcards to the members . . .

Ellen got out her old files and minute books and carbon copies of letters and extra cards, and so on, and began showing them to Stan, explaining references like the Three Sixty Five Club, where A.A.

people visiting downtown Elkhart could drop in and sit down and have a cup of coffee and chat with whatever other A.A. members happened to be there.

ELLEN: This is my old address book, I was secretary, and it's the A.A. directory, and I lived on Monroe Street, and all the addresses and everything is in there. And you'd send these cards, and that way you knew where the meetings were.

The Three Sixty Five Club was by the Wrenches. They had a radiator shop, and they used to hold meetings down there.

One of the things that I thought you might be interested in was that I sent a card to a man, well, in here his name is Carl Bigeler, and we kept sending cards, and finally we got a letter from him, and he wanted to know if we were a "subversive activity," because all the cards would say on them was that — [reaching down to pick one up] here's a card, these are the cards that we sent.

STAN: Oh, I see!

ELLEN: No names.

STAN: Just has "Friday, party night, Three Sixty Five Club, Too Big-Sized Group, Monroe Street, Third and Lexington" — he didn't — it doesn't say anything of Alcoholics Anonymous or anything.

ELLEN: No, uh-uh, just . . . .

STAN: Just sounds like some kind of secret society or something.

ELLEN: Yeah, so he said, "Resident, 1022 Monroe Street. I received cards such as the enclosed" — this was in August of 1959 — "on several occasions, which have aroused my curiosity. However, if you are organizing a communist cell or some other subversive organization, I am not interested. May I expect a reply as to the purpose of these cards?"

STAN: So did you respond?

ELLEN: I did, here's my letter. Heh! I got a carbon of it. It says, "Mr. Bigeler, I am writing in answer to your query to the cards you've been receiving from time to time. Please accept our apology. These were meant for someone else with a name similar to yours. However, in preparing our mailing list the incorrect address has been used. Since the error has been made, and you've been so inconvenienced with someone else's mail, I shall make this explanation in order that you may know we are not a subversive organization. Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women . . . ." and I went on to say . . . .

STAN: Read the Preamble.

ELLEN: Uh huh. "The purpose of the cards submit that we use to inform the members, for some reason who are not able to attend the last meeting, the place of the next meeting to be held. We do not use names because of the group policy never to reveal names at a public level, however due to the error that has been made, I am signing my name. I hope you will respect my wishes and keep this undisclosed. I have been placed on the committee for mailing, and at this time I have removed your address from the list. On behalf of the group, once more, please accept our apology."

STAN: Quite a ninth step, huh!?

ELLEN: Yeah! [Laughing] So those are some of the humorous things that . . . happened.

The weekly open meeting at St. John's always had homemade refreshments served, Ellen said. This was intended to be as much a party as a formal meeting, when everybody from all three discussion groups got together to hear a speaker, but also just to chat and enjoy being with one another. Alcoholism is a disease of isolationism, where the drinker becomes more and more psychologically and

spiritually cut off from other human beings, “alone even in the midst of a crowd.” In the process, the lonely alcoholic’s thought processes become more and more skewed, and fall deeper and deeper into fantasy and bizarre notions about the world. Alcoholics do not start healing until they become involved in real *fellowship* with other A.A. members, who provide a fundamentally healthy group, which can bring isolated alcoholics back into the human race. It is a healthy (and hence healing) set of social relationships, because A.A. fellowship is based on honesty, openness, and mutual respect, where all are treated with equal love and dignity, regardless of money, clothes, education, job, physical appearance, or any of the other issues that so often separate people. *Eating good food and simply having a party and having healthy fun is just as important to the healing process as engaging in the deep study of spiritual issues.*

ELLEN: Oh, O.K. I got down here, when you asked about the original group, we had a Dr. Swihart in the group, and his wife Louise always made the pies. On Saturday night — this is something they don’t do anymore — on Saturday night, the group was small enough that we had refreshments, every Saturday night. Manys a Saturday night, or Saturday, that Zora and I have baked six or eight apple pies to take down there on Saturday night, for a group of thirty or forty people. She’d bake so many, and then I’d bake so many. And we’d take apple pie, we’d take doughnuts — you always got your money back — but somebody was always — it wasn’t just one person. Somebody every week was charged to do the refreshments, and open the meeting, and open the hall. But it was a different person. Maybe you took it for a month, and then it was swung around to somebody else.

STAN: Kind of like a rotating chairman?

ELLEN: Uh huh, uh huh. The same way as the meetings that were held in the houses.

Ellen then began to talk about the constant contact they had with the South Bend people and the South Bend group activities at that time, mentioning the names of a number of well-known people in A.A. from the other city, like Brownie (who was talked about in several of the preceding chapters) and the Wilkie's. Pat Wilkie, a very frank and perceptive woman, was originally from Scotland, and was in the RAF during the Second World War, coming to the United States after the war was over. She and her third husband, Tony Wilkie, came into the A.A. program together in 1958. Just three months before her death, when the research for this book was first begun in 1993, Pat went through a list of all the names of area old timers which had been assembled from various sources — just first names and last initials were all we had at that point — and told us who large numbers of these early figures were, and something about their lives. A good many of the details in this book, particularly in the first volume, are Pat's contribution.

Yeah, we used to have, Brownie from South Bend used to come over a lot, and we would . . . and that's another thing, I heard him tell it in his story one night, how he used to come out, and we'd go out east, we used to go out to Chuck Smith and his wife's on Saturday night after the big meeting, and have coffee and stay and talk until one or two o'clock in the morning. And there's be, oh, anywhere from ten, fifteen of us out there, and then sometimes they'd come down to my house, and we'd have ten or twelve people.

And I took my classes over to South Bend, like I said, with Ken Merrill. They used to have dances over there, where we didn't. We used to go to the New Year's Eve parties over there, a bunch of us, and we intermingled.

But in South Bend, like I said, we used to get with Brownie and Pat and . . . I just noticed their names in here, Pat and Tony Wilkie, do you know them? Well, they're from South Bend too. And, as a matter of fact, here's when I was lined up to talk, and September the 10th was Mrs. Tony Wilkie, Pat was her name. And on September 17th was Ray Tinsley, and on September 24th was Herman Loren.

In good old-time A.A., people traveled long distances to get to know the A.A. members in other towns. It helped strengthen their program, because individuals could learn from all the outstanding people from their geographical area. The best men and women in the program even today will have close A.A. friendships all over northern Indiana, tied together in a bond of love and fellowship and mutual support. They travel back and forth between South Bend, Elkhart, Syracuse, Wabash, Anderson, Fairmount, Indianapolis, and beyond, and you can see the smiles and hugs and the joy on their faces whenever they meet again.

The A.A. group in Elkhart was trying to work out ways of dealing with the lack of alcoholism treatment facilities in those days. They were held in great respect by the Elkhart Police, so when a policeman picked up a drunk who looked like what he or she really needed was not being locked up in jail, but some compassionate care and watchguarding from someone who knew something about alcoholism to supervise the drying up process, the police station had a list of A.A. phone numbers handy and would call one of the A.A. people — a man if the drunk was male, or a woman if the drunk was female — and ask them to come take the alcoholic off their hands. For a while, the Elkhart A.A. group also had a very useful arrangement with the old Elkhart County Home. The A.A. team could calm the alcoholics down, convey them there, and the home

would provide these people with a bed and food, and let them do some work around the place after they got a little better.

[Bobby and I] were both on answering service . . . at that time, we were registered at the police station. They had my number at the police station. If they got somebody they — especially a lady — that they thought needed help, they would call me. And regardless of the time, down we'd go. I'd call Bobby, and away we'd go! We'd find somebody to drive us, and we would go. And this was going on all the time — we were really active. Then we began to get more girls in. But seemed like they never stayed . . .

Now, as I said, there wasn't any treatment places. We'd get a girl, and we'd have to take her — if she was destitute — we had to take her out to the Elkhart County Home. And then we would call on her out there, we'd go pick her up out there and take her to meetings, and see that she was cared for. If she got a job, then she was able to find an apartment. We worked it in that system. But we made sure that they had treatment.

We had a doctor in A.A., Art Kistner, and he always would give Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> shots for us — I had many a Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> shot through Dr. Kistner, to get rid of the shakes and things. And he did that with every member, and charged very little, probably the amount of the shot, I have every idea — it was just the drug itself, or the vitamin itself that you got, and paid for — because you could go in and get a shot for a dollar, so you know that he wasn't overcharging you, but I imagine he had to do that for the sake of medicine.

The Elkhart hospital would treat some alcoholics going through the worst part of the detoxification process during the first two or three days, when the possibility always existed of the alcoholic going

into massive seizures, throwing the heart and breathing rhythms entirely off. If that happened, death would result in a matter of minutes if expert medical treatment was not instantly available. Alcohol is the most dangerous of all drugs by far during detoxing — without first-rate and constant medical supervision, many people die.

The problem was that, even after the initial period of acute danger was over, although the alcoholics did not need advanced hospital care of that sort, they were nevertheless hardly in any shape to take care of themselves by themselves. Two A.A. women who moved to Elkhart at about that time and began going to the Elkhart A.A. group, Claire Crowliss and Billie Close, got Ellen involved in an arrangement where women alcoholics who were released from the Elkhart hospital after initial detoxing would be housed in one of their homes until they had recovered enough to get a job and find a place of their own.

ELLEN: Back in 1959, in 1960, the resources for treatment were still few and far between for women alcoholics in this area, so we had a girl had come from California, from an A.A. group there, and one from Erie, Pennsylvania, from an A.A. group there, and they settled in Elkhart. They were both secretaries, one was secretary over to WTRC, and the other was a secretary to another firm here in Elkhart. And I, of course, was a bookkeeper at another firm in Elkhart.

But we had our lines at work just as available to us to do twelfth step work — our employers all knew we were alcoholics, and they all gave us permission to use their line, and if we got a call from Elkhart General Hospital, they used to — if a girl come in and was real bad, and then she got better after treatment at Two Northwest, and she had to be released because she was past the treatment stage for physical, they would call one of us, and we would take her

and keep her in our home for a week, maybe ten days, till she got on her feet real good, got her out, and she found a job, and we kept her till she had an apartment, first paycheck, and could get her an apartment, and then we kept in contact with her.

We did that, probably for four or five years before the treatment center started to take place. I think it was about 1964, it was when — it was in that area, '64, '65 — that Booze Driers came into effect.

STAN: Which is now Life House.

ELLEN: Which is now Life House, right.

STAN: Do you remember the two ladies' names, from Pennsylvania and California?

ELLEN: Yes, Claire Crowliss was from Pennsylvania, and Billie Close from California — her parents, Billie's parents, lived here in Elkhart, and she had gotten a divorce and had come back with her two children.

But Claire was from the east, and once you heard her talk, you knew she was from the east! And she always entertained us with her delightful alcoholic recovery, because she had money, but her father, she used to tell about how her father was connected with Al Capone. So she knew what that kind of life was, but she told how, after she'd met her husband, and she had a little money, how she'd take this big floppy hat and all her dogs and go down to the store with a jar full of pennies to buy a bottle of wine. But she was really great and she helped me a great deal.

I think working with the girls from the hospital was a big inducement to my sobriety, because every time I brought one home, I would say, "for the grace of God go I." I mean, I could have been in the same . . . if my husband hadn't been kind enough to keep me with him, I could have been in the same situation. And I have always been grateful that I was able to do that, and if it hadn't have been for him, I couldn't even have had them in my home. I had to have

the cooperation of him too, to be able to keep 'em, 'cause I wasn't working part of the time, and then in 1958 I went to work full time.

But before that . . . . I kept Alice in my home for something like four weeks out of there, and . . . I kept her there until she found a job. And I kept Edie, and Edie and I corresponded up till about four years ago, and I lost track of her, she was in Florida. But she had a sister in California who was also in A.A., and I was able to keep . . . . And then Barbara, out of Chicago, used to come down and see me a lot too. I can't remember . . . . You're really getting my mind going here, I've forgotten so many of those girls, 'cause they got better and they moved away.

Looking through her files again, Ellen talked a little about the numbers and finances in the early days.

ELLEN: I took a poll in August of 1959, and we had 123 members in Elkhart. Now we have that many [groups meeting every week, we have grown so much larger]. 123 members, and we had sober (but not coming to meeting) 22. I mean, they came off and on, but not regular. Those coming regularly were 26. We could count on 26 coming. Then there were 39 that just plain didn't come. Maybe you'd see 'em on the street, and maybe they'd say something about A.A., and "I'll be back," but that's the last you heard from 'em. We had nine from out of town coming, from different towns . . . . like from, well one was from Dowagiac, several from Goshen, 'cause like Goshen Bill, and of course Bush Bill wasn't coming then, but George Mills was, and Dean Barnhardt and it was another one, I can't remember what his name was, maybe I'll run across it here.

Oh, another thing that I think was interesting that we did then that they don't do now. To support the General

Service Office in New York, everybody that said that they were good sober alcoholics pledged three dollars. And you didn't take it out of the collection, you put it in yourself . . . . to send twice a year to New York . . . . That was in '59, '60, '61, in there.

Many of the close A.A. friends who had formed her immediate support group eventually moved away, and Ellen finally found herself trying to take care of too many A.A. jobs and too many needy alcoholics. She did not go back out and drink — her A.A. program was too solidly based by then for that — but in 1961, ten years after her last drink, she did have a nervous breakdown, and had to learn the hard way not to drive herself so severely.

ELLEN: And Zora moved back to Laporte when she and Jim got a divorce. And I haven't talked to her for probably five or six years now. But we were very close at one time — like I said, she really helped me on the program — and Claire helped me so much. Bobby moved away, she and Ed got divorced. Bobby moved away about 1954, '55, '56, I don't remember, but in that area, and that's when Zora and I got closer, to talk A.A., and get the girls going, and then Clare moved in, and then Billie moved in.

And it was in 1961, I guess, it finally got to me, I think maybe I was trying to carry the load instead of the message, because I had a nervous breakdown. And I didn't have a drink, but I had a nervous breakdown. And I ended up in Two Northwest. And who was there but Billie!

STAN: As a patient?

ELLEN: As a patient, we both were a patient at the same time! After we'd done all this work, we both ended up over there, as a patient. Neither one of us drinking, but both mentally . . .

STAN: Wore out.

ELLEN: . . . wore out.

The need for an area alcoholism treatment center was partially solved for a while, when the Indiana state psychiatric facility at Westville began to take in alcoholics. This took some of the pressure off of Elkhart A.A. people like Ellen, who were not only trying to stay sober themselves, but were having to patch together make-do arrangements for people just sobering up, which actually required an institutional facility with residential beds to do properly.

ELLEN: Again, a treatment center arose. They had one in Westville, and we were getting some of our members to go to Westville for treatment for anywhere from a week to four weeks.

STAN: Do you remember the name of it?

ELLEN: It was just called Westville.

STAN: Just Westville.

ELLEN: It was like for insane people, but they had an alcoholic ward.

STAN: I see.

ELLEN: Uh huh.

STAN: An asylum-type . . . ?

ELLEN: Uh huh, it was an asylum-type thing. I don't know what they're doing there now. But they did away with [the alcoholic treatment program there eventually, and we're having to use other facilities now].

So [after my nervous breakdown in 1961] I quit doing that [taking women into my home for a week or so to recuperate], and by that time, we begin to send them to Westville for treatment. And Helen Leppert went to Westville, and I remember I used to have to go down there, and Bertha Gallagher, Marty's wife (I am sure he'd say that, if it came up into the conversation). And we used to have to go down there and see them.

My husband went down there for treatment. By this time he was beginning to be a little bit alcoholic, I thought, but he signed up and went down there for three weeks. But he isn't active in A.A., and he is an active alcoholic. But, I can't say that he's an alcoholic, because he doesn't seem to have a problem like I did, it doesn't seem to affect him all three ways. He has a physical reaction, but that's about it. So I can't say that he's an alcoholic, till he says it.

Some very small percentage of alcoholics have what is only a physical addiction to alcohol without any deep psychological, spiritual, or moral issues mixed in.<sup>32</sup> Also in another small percentage of cases the disease is so slow progressing that the victims can live out close to a normal life span, without losing a job or their home over it, and without being thrown into an asylum or jail. But these latter cases are miserably bitter and unhappy people by the end of their lives, living in a hellish, muddled daze, and requiring someone (usually a spouse) to act as their caretaker. The fact that they are not dead or locked up does not mean that they are not desperately sick. They also make everyone around them miserable by the way they speak and act towards others.

Ellen talked about a temporary split which occurred in the Elkhart group around 1960. This was a repeated pattern in A.A. in the wider St. Joseph river valley area: on occasion, clashes in personality or style would produce a rift, and the setting up of rival meetings, which would go on for a year or two before the dissension healed itself.

If one group, out of personal idiosyncrasies, decided to alter the standard A.A. way of doing things too much, that group would soon begin to wither away and die, because at the pragmatic level you could not make many alterations in the way A.A. meetings were ordinarily run, or people would no longer be getting sober and

staying sober in that group. A.A. is not a rigid, doctrinaire system in the normal sense, it is just that the twelve steps and twelve traditions were originally worked out the hard way, as the only way of doing things that actually seemed to work in practice. If you try to change anything basic, it stops working.

ELLEN: I was at the original Serenity Group. Our group, our bunch split away from them. They were having a . . . there was a rift. And so I don't remember all the details on the rift at all, but I know that Marty stayed with the other group [which called itself the Elkhart Group], Sam stayed with the other group, but our group — Marion Marshall, Clint Becker, and (this was 1960 or 61) John Teall, and all of them. Well, we got so on Saturday night, we only had twelve down there, twelve to fifteen people was all that was showing up [at the Elkhart Group] . . . So [the rest of us] decided that, if we had to . . . we started having meetings, and I know, one of the meetings . . . I don't remember whether it was here or over to . . . but I think it was right here at this house, we'd just moved out here. And Marion suggested — Marion Marshall was the one that suggested that the name be called Serenity.

STAN: I see.

ELLEN: So that's how we started the Serenity Group. Then we began to send out cards again, for the Serenity Group, and then we also added the regular Elkhart Group. But the Elkhart Group folded. The man that was instigating the trouble there moved back where he came from, and it just . . . well they started coming to our groups again. And so then we got back into . . . but it was Serenity after that, instead of the Elkhart Group.

STAN: You had it fixed.

ELLEN: Uh huh. Yeah. And then, oh, let's see. That was in 1960, I think I have a letter here too, that Ed even

wrote. Here's the first: "The steering committee will be held in January 15, 1961," and it was held on a Sunday, because this is the only time that you could get together, everybody worked. We had our steering committee meeting at Sam and Helen's.

"With eleven present, election was held for the following with the results as follows: Secretary Harold Flechner, and Paul Draper, Assistant. Treasurer Sam Auel, with John Teall Assistant. The representatives from each closed group to be elected at meetings for steering committee for the ensuing year. Advanced [??] Service Representative Harold, and alternate Alice. Kitchen Chairman it was decided that Mary Jane G. and Helen would take care of, between themselves. A setup for classes was discussed with this decision: Sue Swain Step One, Ellen L. Step Two and Three, F. Flechner Steps Four and Five, Ellen Steps Six and Seven, John Teall for Steps Eight and Nine, Alice for Step Ten, Marty Step Eleven, and Ray Step Twelve."

STAN: Who's Ray?

ELLEN: Ray . . . it's gotta be in my book. But . . . he ended up going out again. And Alice did too, his wife. . . .

Now here's a letter that Ed wrote in May 8, 1960, when our group had started to go downhill a little bit, and we needed lots of support. I think our Serenity Group came into being in 1965, which followed that a little bit.

STAN: This is a letter by Ed Pike, trying to get the group back together?

ELLEN: Right.

STAN: And he's lining up some speakers?

ELLEN: Uh huh. Oh! Ed always had good speakers.

STAN: Yeah, Brownie from South Bend May 14th, Winnie from Brooklyn the 28th, Saturday the 21st a pot luck supper, talk by Jim O'Malley from Chicago. Uh, let's see, "Crowd of a dozen folks has been a good turnout, in a

mostly because of an effort by Marty Gallagher and Ellen Lantz and John Teall. Won't you try to come back? Doesn't the prospect of no A.A. in Elkhart for many who are still suffering sort of scare you? Where would you and I be now if those who were here before us hadn't tried to keep the group alive for us ? Sincerely, your friend in A.A., Ed Pike, May 8, 1960."

In 1965, when she was around forty-four years old, Ellen moved to the house in which she spent the rest of her life.<sup>33</sup> She also changed jobs at that point.

As a result of the temporary split in the Elkhart A.A. movement, a new meeting place was obtained in downtown Elkhart and called Serenity Hall. A Saturday night open meeting began to be held there for those who did not wish to go to the group that still met at St. John's Episcopal church on that evening.

It was also around that time that Elkhart developed its first local alcoholism treatment center in the proper sense. The man who spearheaded the project was named Bough (pronounced "boo"), so with a rather crude sense of humor the facility came universally to be called "Booze Driers" by the St. Joseph river valley A.A. people when talking among themselves.

It was later to be renamed "Life House" and most recently, in the 1990's, moved out of Elkhart and took over an old hotel on South Michigan Street in South Bend, which was turned into a totally remodeled, extremely effective residence facility called Life Treatment Center. It operates as a nonprofit treatment facility for totally indigent alcoholics. The three key A.A. people from the area who worked to bring about this last transformation were Father John Wilson at the University of Notre Dame (who helped get his university involved in the financing and organizing), Bob Firth ("Brooklyn Bob") from South Bend, and Submarine Bill, who is

active in the Elkhart A.A. fellowship. The treatment center is also enormously helped by the legislation and financial help originally set up at the beginning of the 1970's by A.A. member Senator Harold Hughes (the governor of Iowa who had just been elected to the U.S. Senate), working in close cooperation with a number of other A.A. people in positions of national influence.<sup>34</sup> Life Treatment Center has a higher success rate than any other treatment facility in the area. The A.A. people who helped set it up say that this is because they quietly insist that a large proportion of the professional staff must be themselves recovering alcoholics who are active in A.A. In keeping with the A.A. traditions of course, Life Treatment Center's governing board and financing is in no way officially associated with A.A.

ELLEN: Ah . . . I don't know what else . . . .

STAN: Well, you were starting to talk about Booze Driers, how it . . . .

ELLEN: Oh, O.K. This one . . . what was his name? . . . Darrell Bough came up with the idea that he'd like to have a treatment place for people to go to, and he found out that this old house out on 120 was for sale. And so, as a group, I think some kind of a group, they rented it or something, and now, here's another thing that a lot of people don't know . . . Do you know Marion Marshall?

STAN: Yes.

ELLEN: O.K. Marion wired [the electricity for the house], seeing that that was updated in wiring . . . . And there was a lot of work, the fellows went over there night after night, working to get that place available. And it started then.

STAN: Do you remember the date, or the month or year?

ELLEN: No, I think it had to be '65 or '66. Or it could'a been '64. [My husband and I] moved where we're at now in 1965, and I think it was started either just before we moved, or after we moved. But it was about the time the Serenity Group was started. But we were meeting upstairs in that old hall on a Saturday night, this was . . . when our groups had split, and our Saturday night group, instead of being at St. John's, was upstairs there.

STAN: Serenity Hall?

ELLEN: At Serenity Hall, upstairs, up town, there by the Buckland Theater . . . Yeah . . . where they're gonna tear it down. Yeah, yeah, it was right over the old Goodwill Store. And another thing, we had members furnish it, brought all the furnishings for that hall.

And there was a June that was in the program at the time, can't remember what her last name was. We went up and we put shelving paper all over, and got the kitchen all ready, and got everything set for Saturday night meetings. And we were having then, probably . . . twenty-five to thirty people on Saturday night in that little hall, and that was pretty good.

And they were still serving refreshments yet then. I think that stopped when they (here comes my husband) went over to the other hall, which is fine. *[Ellen laughs]* We didn't need all that food, that's no wonder I gained fifty-five pounds after I got sober!

Anyway — between that hall and the [alcoholism treatment] house — why, we kept busy!

STAN: What, was that house called Booze Driers?

ELLEN: Yes, it was called Booze Driers, uh huh.

STAN: That was in '65?

ELLEN: It had to be right in there somewhere. I know it was in function in '68, because, well I changed jobs in '65 and I worked over that way, and I used to have to go by on my way home, and so I know it was between '65 and

'68. Well that winter that we had — was it '67 we had that awful storm? '67 and '68? . . . Uh huh, well, we had an awful storm, and I know I got stuck, and I walked over to Booze Driers to call my husband to come after me.

STAN: Than it moved to Wolf [Street]?

ELLEN: Yes, then it moved to Wolf. They tried to get the Elkhart County Home for it, but it didn't go through, and the Elkhart County Home, of course, was taken down. But they did try to get it.

In reminiscing about those years, Ellen suddenly recalled that this was the period when Goshen Bill first came into the program (he came in c. 1964), and began remembering with delight the impact that extraordinary character had had on people. We will devote several chapters to him after finishing Ellen's story.

ELLEN: And Goshen Bill! Goshen Bill started. And one of his first meetings was at my house.

STAN: Do you remember that year?

ELLEN: Well, it was before we moved out here, so it had to be '63 or '64, because I remember him saying, at the time, I had fifteen years sobriety, and I remember him saying, "Boy! Aren't you lucky!" [*Chuckling*] You know how, in his way, he was really . . . And I know that he was one of the first colored A.A.'s in this area, outside of South Bend. And it was nice to have him around. He *really* loved this program.

When she was about fifty-one, Ellen had a heart attack. She quit attending A.A. meetings for the next five years, but remained sober. In 1977, however, she decided to jump back into regular activity in the program once again.

ELLEN: For five years I did not go to A.A. I had a heart attack in 1972, and I couldn't climb those stairs up there [at the old Serenity Hall]. Well, between that time and 1978, when I . . . went back to meetings, they expanded more, and they got really big.

STAN: Yeah, and they meet on Saturday night too, the Serenity Group does still.

ELLEN: Yes, that's out there at the other St. John's, yeah. 'Cause I go out there, I just talked out there two weeks ago, Saturday night. In 19 . . . well I think it was really '77 I started to go back, 'cause Betty O. always tells how she came in and there weren't any women. I said they were, they just weren't showing up! Because she had a hard row.

But I didn't drink while I was gone, but I used to have contact with A.A. members. I didn't go to the meetings, but I used to see Marion Marshall, I had to pick up the mail for my company every morning at the post office, and he had to pick up mail, and we'd stop and we'd talk. And then I'd see John Teall, and we'd stop and we'd talk. And I'd see Elmer, and we'd stop and we'd talk. And then we'd go out and have coffee and talk. So I mean I never really lost contact with A.A. itself, just contact with the group [meetings themselves] while they were meeting upstairs.

For some unknown reason, it seems to be the case that when women alcoholics first come into the program, a great number of them do not like other women, and in particular they do not trust them at all. Perhaps it goes back to inadequate bonding with their own mothers, in the pre-Freudian period of early infancy, because inadequate bonding (and then incomplete separation) at that early stage seems to have occurred with most male alcoholics. The effects in later life would be quite different for girls and boys, because any difficulty with the mother relationship would naturally have little

effect *per se* on the male alcoholics' ability (after arriving at adulthood) to relate to other men, and talk openly in a group of men, and make a fifth step with a male sponsor.

On the other hand, since a number of good sponsors in this area all agree that around ninety percent of women alcoholics (around here at any rate) have suffered some kind of sexual abuse during their childhood, normally at the hands of a male, it is not clear at all as to why these women would then, during recovery, nevertheless still start off by trusting men more than women.

Nevertheless, it is clear that, for deep healing to occur, a woman alcoholic has to make peace with her own femininity so that she can begin to trust and like other women, at least a little bit — it goes hand in hand with genuinely learning to like herself. It is a hard job. Because of the barrier of mistrust, it is also more difficult to find women who can successfully sponsor other women than it is to find male sponsors for men newly coming into the program.

At one level, Ellen was able to form warm friendships of a sort with Bobby Pike and Zora and a couple of other women in the program from the very beginning, but significantly, when it came time to do her fifth step, she went to a man. During the five years she was not going to meetings, the only three remaining contacts with A.A. which she retained were all with men. There was still an underlying hostility towards other women, where a deeper healing did not start to take place until she returned to the A.A. table five years after her heart attack. She tells the story of what happened then simply and openly:

ELLEN: And one day, when I was in the post office, Marion said to me, "Ellen, you know you can come now, because we're on a lower floor. You wouldn't have to climb the steps." And he said, "We've got a woman's group meeting."

I said, “You know darn well I wouldn’t want a woman’s group. I couldn’t stand ’em! They’re cats!”

And so he said, “Uh, well, uh, they say it’s pretty good.”

And I said, “Well, maybe one of these days I’ll get brave enough and come down,” and sure enough, I did it.

And after that, you couldn’t . . . . That’s my base group now, [the Women’s group], uh huh. You bet! I hate to miss those. They are really great, and . . . I really had to bite my tongue for what I said about women getting together.

STAN: It’s an honest program!!!

*[Ellen laughs heartily.]*

A.A. is about healing and getting well, about learning how to genuinely love others but also how to truly love ourselves, at all the levels of our being. As Bill C. the submariner often says when talking about what happened to him when he came into the program, *“When I came to A.A., I met a stranger. And I learned to love that stranger. And that stranger was me.”*

There was still one area of love in which Ellen had been lacking, up to that point. But for those who continue to work the twelve step program with full dedication, the missing parts will eventually be filled in. The old A.A. maxim always seems to be true: no matter what it is in my spirit and my psyche that needs to be healed, *“when the student is ready the teacher will appear.”*

## Chapter 8

# Carrying the Message

In 1985, when this lead of Ellen's was recorded,<sup>35</sup> she had cancer. It had been put into temporary partial remission, but Ellen knew that she nevertheless did not have too much longer to live. She was around sixty-four years old, and had thirty-four years of sobriety. When she began her lead, she mentioned that her life was now, especially, on borrowed time:

I'm happy to be here tonight, I'm happy to share this night with Betty [O.] The fact that she has this many birthdays really gives me a pleasure.

My name is Ellen Lantz, and I *am* an alcoholic. Now if you came tonight expecting a big speech, you won't get it. I tell the same story — the ending is a little different every time, because as you live each day, one day at a time, it does change and you change — but the beginning and the middle of my story is the same. But, however, I'm so grateful to be here tonight to share with you.

I found here a few months ago that I had a terminal illness, and God has given me, today, another [day of] life to live, and I know that I don't know how long I'll have, but no one else does either. But I do know that he's extended my life for a purpose, and I trust that purpose is to carry the message, and as Bill W. said, "pass it on." And so today,

I'm doing everything I can, through every twenty-four hours, to live up to what Bill did, and to maintain my sobriety, which is the most important thing for me, because without my sobriety I would have absolutely nothing . . . .

And I do have cancer, and I have cancer of the pancreas, and it was a tumor, and they couldn't remove it. It was a tumor about 517. I have been able to keep my blood count up — thanks to God, thanks for the prayers and the love of all you people, that I have been able to take my chemotherapy once a week — and they gave me a CAT scan three weeks ago, and that tumor had diminished by 270, and is now 317, and my doctor is very happy . . . . So with each day that I have left, I hope to share it with you.<sup>36</sup>

What was the message that Ellen wanted so much to carry and to pass on to others? Her first three and a half years in the program, she was not truly working the steps on *her own life*, she said, and so on three occasions she went back out for another binge where she drank to total blackout for two or three days. It was when she came to from her last drunk, on March 27, 1951, that she was finally forced to confront the truth of her own life. She somehow got to Zora's house, and as was already recounted, Zora simply told her:

“[Take] some paper. You go in my bedroom, you shut the door, and you start your fourth step and get it done — *right* this time. Not Leon's, *yours*.” . . . I went in there, but you know, I said to God, “Please help me.” And God did that for me. Because, when I started to write that inventory, I couldn't write fast enough. It was just like my whole darn life and everything that I had ever done that bothered me was there on the surface for me to pick up, and do something about.

I got the list made out, and I went out the door, and Zora was at the sink doing dishes; she said, “What are you going

to do now?" I said, "I'm going over to the pastor's house," which was over on Benham Ave. . . . I took my fifth step, . . . we kneeled, we had our prayer . . . I came out of that parsonage, and I felt like a million dollars.

And here in the Big Book it tells us exactly what to do when we've taken this step. It says, we go home and we reflect by ourself for an hour, or maybe more, that's what it takes. And believe me, in that hour's reflection, you can reflect so many things!

I had no idea of all the good things God was gonna give to me when I did that step. Because, on the pivot of that step, I was able to continue and become willing to have my character defects removed. I know it's a slow process, but I know each day as I live, that God makes it a little easier, and the talent that I have is for me to know that God has removed those defects of character. I was able to humbly ask him to remove these — and I had some real dillies. I'm sure you've never heard of 'em, you know!!! — like anger, resentment, jealousy, suspicion — about thirty-five or forty of 'em anyway, just as fast as you could name 'em down the line.

Then when I did that, the hard steps came again, because I had so many amends to make. And again the Big Book told us what to do. If we could face that person without causing them any harm we should do it. That also included those people who we'd become indebted to. I sat down one day, and I wrote many a letter for indebtedness, telling them that I would do the best I could, that we would pay just a little at a time if it was necessary, that we were willing to do something about it. Because needless to say, all this time that we had been drinking, the bills were being let go and let go and let go.

Then came the tenth step. And here it (to me) is the continuance step. Every day I must take my own inventory. I must thank God for the day he has given me. Every day

when I get up, and I open my little Twenty-Four Hour Book, like you all have, and I see that thought for the day, I thank my God as I understand him that today I am able to stay sober, that today he has given me just a semblance of sanity — and once in a while, a waver of serenity!

*I love that. I love being alive today; every day is exciting. I don't want to give any day up that I don't have to. Each day is too exciting.*

Our eleventh step, we learned to have a more personal contact with our higher power, and for me, that was to go back to the church of my choice, to get involved in it as much as I could, to let them know who I am, and what I am, and my church knows that I'm an alcoholic. And it was one of those hard churches . . . . Our pastor knows it, it's no secret. But they respect what God has given me: my sobriety.

The twelfth step: this is the one where our action comes in. I really love this twelfth step. I think that God has granted me this extra life just for this twelfth step, to carry on to those what he has given for me, to pass it on. I sponsor girls, we have classes. I love every minute. I've retired this year, and I'm enjoying every day to the fullest. The girls come and go as they please. All they have to do is pick up the phone. If I'm there, we meet. We go here, we go there.

One of the girls called me at 10:30 this morning, "Are you home? I got some new yarn last night, I got to bring it over and show it to you." When she got over there, I liked it so well, she took me where she went to get it, and I got some yarn — just what I needed! This is my life today. This is what I am so grateful for.

I told her today, when we were going over to Mishawaka, to the mall, I said, "You know, I'm supposed to talk tonight, I don't know what I'm gonna say. Except I know I need to talk for myself. I need to revive to myself

that I am an alcoholic.” But I said, “You know, when I start talking, I get so carried away, that I forget time exists.” And I said, “What am I gonna do if, at nine o’clock, I’m only halfway through my story?” I said, “You can’t pack sixty-four years in forty-five minutes — there’s just no way you can do it!” *[Laughter]*

She said, “Well, when you get to nine o’clock, you look at the clock, and if you’re not done, you tell ’em come back next week, and you’ll give ’em the conclusion.” *[Laughter]* So . . . I am getting done, though, isn’t that great? I can’t believe it.

I do want . . . I have this feeling, for me anyway, that we each have a special talent. Mine is not singing. I can’t tat, much as I’d love to, my fingers just won’t work right. But I think we need to share our talents.

I love people, and I’m sure that they love me back. I feel it. You can feel love. You can just sense it every time. I’ve become more aware of that.

The A.A. program is not about intellectually “solving the problem of my life,” or even about rationally “figuring out how the program works.” It is about treating a disease that affects us at the level of our deepest feelings, by supplying the appropriate counter-feelings.

It is an Augustinian therapy, if one might wish to put it that way. St. Augustine said in the *City of God* that the sickness in our souls arises because our loves become distorted by being put on the wrong objects. But you do not produce real healing, he said, by attempting to suppress the emotions and chain down the passions and kill all the spirit and fire and enthusiasm — what you must do is teach these souls somehow to put all their enormous passions and enthusiasms onto appropriate objects: not only emotions like love and desire and

joy, but even the ones like sorrow and fear. And love, St. Augustine said, is the great key to it all.<sup>37</sup>

But as Ellen says, love is something you have to *feel*. If you start actually paying attention to your own feelings, you can *sense* whether love is present there. She learned that from her daily reading in Richmond Walker's *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, the great early A.A. spiritual classic.<sup>38</sup>

In ancient Greek, the word *aisthêsis* referred to how we sense things, particularly through the sense of feeling, so reading that word in its original sense, we could say that the A.A. program is practical training (Greek *praxis*) in *the aesthetics of love*: if I open up my feelings I can sense the love of the other people around the A.A. table for me, I can learn to feel (in prayer and meditation) the current of divine love that comes from God and gives me my very being, I can practice trying to love other people, and finally, I can learn to feel true, unconditional love for the little child of God within myself — flaws and imperfections and all!

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Ellen closed her lead that night with a rewritten version of a traditional Protestant hymn.<sup>39</sup>

Take my life, and let it be  
 Consecrated, Lord, to thee.  
 Take my moments and my days;  
 Let them flow in ceaseless praise.  
 Take my hands, and let them move  
 At the impulse of thy love.  
 Take my feet, and let them be  
 Swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing  
 Always, only, for my King.

Take my lips, and let them be  
Filled with messages from thee.

The temporary partial remission in her cancer was given to her by God, Ellen believed, as a special gift to allow her to continue to carry out the Twelfth Step mission, and especially to carry this particular message, for a few additional weeks or months — not long, but longer than the doctors had originally given her. That was why the life she was living that evening was given to her as a special, extra present from God, and that was what she was busy doing. The hymn she chose to rephrase was extremely appropriate: it was one in which I pray to God to “take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from thee.”

Her poetry was not brilliant, and she herself poked a bit of fun at what she had done by describing her rewritten version of that hymn as a “paragram.” There was a quiet, self-deprecating humor in Ellen’s way of speaking about things, a little smile or chuckle tucked in from time to time amidst her calm, serene, simple language. She refused to take herself too seriously — taking yourself too seriously is the way the old destructive egotism starts to sneak back in.

She explained that the task she found herself faced with, in trying to carry the message and pass it on in the last days of her life, was a little like writing a telegram back in the old days, where you were trying to compress a vital message in a critical situation into *ten words or less!* How was she to convey the most essential and necessary parts of the message God had put on her lips to speak, in a way that was short but spoke the language of the heart?

My one little thing that I like to do is to write poetry. So I try to close with a little poem. Now, I discovered tonight — because I wanted to be sure what I was saying about this — I discovered tonight that there’s no such word — there

*isn't* any such word — as “paragram.” But tonight you’re gonna hear, instead of a parody with a song, you’re gonna hear a paragram. And that comes from the word “telegram.” I just put a “paragram” on it instead of “telegram.” But if this were to be sung, it would be a parody.

So Ellen took the words of the old nineteenth century hymn and rewrote them to say:

Take my life and let it be  
 Sober, dear God, with sanity.  
 Take my moments and my day,  
 Let them flow in sober ways.  
 Take my hands and let them be  
 Helpful God, to another alkie like me.  
 Take my feet, but not to trod  
 On another’s conception of thee, O God.  
 But as they swiftly sweep along  
 Make my voice utter the sobriety song.  
 Flowing in praise, my lips today  
 Thank thee, God, for my sobriety and A.A.!

The original hymn was based on the first verse of chapter twelve of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans in the New Testament.<sup>40</sup> Ellen had surely at some point read the entire passage, where Paul continued his line of thought in the second and third verses. Romans 12:1–3 gave an explanation of what it meant “to think soberly” or to “think in ways that make you sober,” as it says close to the end of the passage:

I call on you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy offering, deeply pleasing to God, as your logical way of worship. Do not

fall into conformity with this era of history, but transform yourselves through a new way of thinking, so that you can prove to yourselves that the will of God is good and deeply pleasing, and whole and consistent. For I say through the grace given to me, to everyone among you, not to think more arrogantly of yourself than you ought to think. Instead, *think in ways that make you sober*, in so far as God distributed some amount of faith to each of you.<sup>41</sup>

The biblical passage explained how to get sober by turning our wills and lives over to the care of God's grace in complete trust and faith and humility, so that we could be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and learn not only how to stay dry, but also how *to think soberly*.

It is also worth looking at the entire hymn that Ellen was using. She paraphrased just the first stanza and a half in her little "paragram." But the words of the third stanza of the old traditional hymn would also have been of special significance to her whenever they sang them in the little church she went to (trained as she was in the spiritual discipline of the twelve steps) for this stanza especially stressed the basic spiritual principle contained in the Third Step of the A.A. program: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*." I think Ellen would have approved of us finishing our telling of her story by thinking about the words of the Third Step and then looking at that third stanza of the hymn, because those words describe so well the way she tried to live her life:

Take my will, and make it thine;  
 It shall be no longer mine.  
 Take my heart, it is thine own;  
 It shall be thy royal throne.  
 Take my love; my Lord, I pour

At thy feet its treasure-store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for thee.

## **Part Four**

### **Goshen Bill**

## Chapter 9

# Sleeping in a Dump Truck

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.

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>42</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 mid 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>43</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.

One of his stories dated back to when he was still living in Los Angeles, California: he had somehow or other concluded one of his drunken sprees in El Capitan, New Mexico (population 800, just outside the Mescalero Apache Reservation), arriving there in a total blackout, so that he could not remember a single thing about how he had gotten to that out-of-the-way place, or why.

I remember going to El Capitan. I mean, I don’t remember going, but I remember being there. I don’t know how I got there — that’s in New Mexico — I don’t know how I got there, don’t know how long I been there. Don’t know. Didn’t know anybody, didn’t even know what town I was in, till I went down to the post office and looked, to find out what town I was in. El Capitan, New Mexico. What am I doing here? I don’t know. Got drunk, I guess.

So, I met a bunch of Mexicans and Indians, and I couldn’t speak either one of the languages, and you talk about making signs, I made some heavy sign, and they found out I wanted a drink. And boy, the party was on! You know, the Mexicans and the Indians loved whiskey, and I wasn’t a Mexican, I wasn’t an Indian, but I loved my whiskey, so I went with ’em. Three days, man, we had a ball!

Their money run short, so wait a minute, I know what I can do, I can call my wife. I called her, and told her where I was, and I wanted some money, wanted to come home. She said, "How much will it take?" I say, "I *think* I can make it on a hundred." Huh! See, I conned her. She sent me a hundred bucks, and now, I would feel cheap to just get up and walk off from these guys, so I want to throw a party. Hehn hehn — I did! The next morning I was in the same place, just as broke as I was that other morning, and ain't left town and ain't got enough money.

I had to call her, and charge it to her telephone, to get some more money. And I was telling 'em what a good wife I had, "Oh, we'll be all right in a few minutes. She was going to wire it to me." Heh! I made a mistake. I was at the bus station, and she wired a ticket, not to be sold! So the best thing I could do was to get on the bus and ride.

I got on that bus, and closer I got to Los Angeles, the madder I got. When I got home, you know what? I caught me a little train, and went down to Compton, and I wouldn't even go home. I was mad at her, she treated me like I was a child! Sent me a hundred and I didn't make it, no progress was there, so she didn't trust me. And I got teed off about that.

She called around, till she found a man that thought he knew where I was. He called, told me she was kind of worried about me, serious illness. "I ain't coming. I ain't going." I said, "Unless she apologize for treating me like I was a kid, I ain't going home." So he told her. Here she come! Fifth of whiskey. Heh, heh! Come in that room and apologized to me for sending me the ticket instead of sending me money, and I crawled in the car. But she didn't open that whiskey! I had to get home to get it open!

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 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 was 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 turn over and over again to 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 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:

### **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.

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 any more 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* any more, 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, 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>44</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.

It was around 1964, as has already been mentioned, and Bill had 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 rest homes 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 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>45</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 10**

# **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>46</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 any of the other spiritual movements which have arisen down through history within traditional Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, or any of the other major 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 existence, 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 some day 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 muddled mind, that he 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 any more.” 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., a very perceptive old timer, says simply that being a practicing alcoholic always involves some kind of gross *self-betrayal*. He still remembers Ernie G. the second 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>47</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>48</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>49</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, 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. 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, it is the word *Islam* which means "surrender" or total submission to God. 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 the *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. in the St. Joseph river valley. 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 freeloadin'. 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 11

# Working the Twelve Steps

In his lead,<sup>50</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 over the St. Joseph river valley region 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. (These 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 [Adam and Eve from scratch]. 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 marvellous 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 unfailing 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 not irreparably in debt, this 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 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>51</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. Zppppp! 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 playgrounds and old playmates.

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*. 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 out 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. "Ahhnn . . . 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.*

## **Part Five**

### **Ed P. the Railroad Man**

## Chapter 12

# The Railroad Conductor Who Couldn't Stop Drinking

A good place to end this account of early Alcoholics Anonymous in the St. Joseph river valley is with the simple but deeply moving words of an A.A. saint (if we may use that totally non-A.A. word), Ed Pike the railroad man from Elkhart.<sup>52</sup>

One part of the city is Elkhart the big railroad town: there are acres of intertwined parallel tracks where box cars and flat cars and tank cars are shunted around by switch engines to re-assemble the long freight trains that cross the United States from coast to coast along the northern transcontinental route. The railroad men who work there and who make up one part of the city's population tend some of them to be a rough crew and heavy drinkers, so not surprisingly, there are a number of them who end up in A.A.

Ed Pike was part of that world. He was born around 1907, and was forty at the time he walked into his first A.A. meeting, he said. Since he came into A.A. there in Elkhart only a few months before Ellen Lantz,<sup>53</sup> this means he made his first meeting somewhere in the first half of 1947. This of course was only four years after Ken M. and Soo C. had started the first A.A. group in the St. Joseph river valley, fifteen miles to their west, at South Bend. Alcoholics Anonymous in Elkhart was even newer than that, and was still just in

its early fledgling stage, but they now had one regular open meeting a week where almost everyone came, and three different house meetings every week.

The material that follows is taken from a tape recording of a lead Ed gave on August 23, 1980, some thirty-three years later. Over those thirty-three years he had been (already from his first year) one of the constant mainstays of the Elkhart A.A. program. His quiet wisdom, his knowledge of how to say the right simple thing to a person at a critical time, and above all the basic decency and love and kindness which one could instantly *sense* and *feel* in the man, made him one of the most universally beloved A.A. figures in the entire region.

Even today, some years after his death, when his name is mentioned to old timers who knew him, one can observe their eyes instantly growing soft with loving reminiscence as they remember instances from the past where they encountered his gentle spirit and calming presence. Just being around him and hearing his voice somehow calmed the troubled spirit and in some inexplicable way filled the soul with the divine peace. He was not only a channel of grace, but a person through whom God could convey what Richmond Walker in *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* called the peace of the Divine Silence, an inner calm which was deeper than any words could express, but which could be felt as the presence of something tranquil and untroubled, whose presence washed away all the worries and disruptive thoughts which had been driving us to desperation, and replaced them with a reassuring awareness that everything was going to work out the way it was supposed to work out, and that we would in fact be able to cope just fine with whatever was happening.

But we should let him speak for himself, and tell us the story of how he came into Alcoholics Anonymous and how it changed his life.

My name is Ed Pike; I am an alcoholic. I haven't come down here to tell you how to do this: I'm not a teacher, I'm not even a speaker. I'm a retired railroad conductor, and I believe that when I was working, I was the best conductor on the system. Course I need hardly add that anything I say tonight is strictly my own opinion!

I can't think why I'd be asked to talk to a group at all except that I am just one more example of the fact that A.A. does work. I came to this program because I did want to stop drinking, and as the tradition says, and as Shirley read, we have to want this program, we have to *want* to stop drinking, and in order to really want to stop we have to be willing to surrender to the fact that what is wrong with us is an *illness*. It has nothing to do with sin, or evil, or weakness, or vice, or chastity, or anything else — it's a disease, the same as high blood pressure, or they used to compare it to mostly to diabetes, because it is incurable.

[There are diseases that in modern times *are* curable], but they have not found a cure for alcoholism, and frankly I don't believe that I would be eager to take that cure if they were to discover one. Because I have learned to *enjoy* living the way I am living with, one day at a time, and not only am I an example that it works, but I am an example — by the grace of God and this fellowship — an example that it works *for a long time*. It doesn't just work for a few weeks, or a few months, or even a few years — it works as long as you want it to work.

And it gets better: sobriety is progressive. The same as our disease is progressive downward, sobriety is progressive upward. By that I mean life does get better. Everything about it gets better. Sometimes I think if it gets

any better, I won't be able to stand it. But I will risk it, one day at a time!

Ed's message began in hope and ended in hope — a message of hope that suffering alcoholics *had* to hear in order to raise them out of their total despair, enough to take at least the first few baby steps along the road that led to life. And that road, once started, leads on and on, revealing to us one glorious experience after another, each one new and different and greater than the previous, going from glory to glory, as the apostle says: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image *from glory to glory*, even as by the spirit of the Lord." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

I have probably drank as much as some of you, probably not as much as some of you — it doesn't really matter how much you drank, or how often you drank. Some of us were only weekend drinkers. I started out drinking every chance I got, and I usually got drunk every time.

When I first started, which was through my school years, I was invited out of Elkhart High School on my sixteenth birthday, because I was *drunk*. And it wasn't the first time that I had been drunk in high school, it was only the first time that they could legally expel me. They had to wait until I was sixteen — I had been sent home previously.

So I went out and got a job on the railroad, and that was the only work that I ever did, with any consistency. I had a few jobs here and there when I was furloughed from the railroad, but most of the time I spent working on the railroad, which is very liberal, or it was. Now they tell me it's pretty tough now since the merger with the Pennsylvania and a whole new bunch of brass — they are pretty rough on Rule G — but they weren't at the time that I worked there, and at the time that I came to A.A.

Now I had gotten to the place where I controlled my drinking. I *am* an alcoholic, I was addicted to alcohol, but as I grew older, I got to the place where I could control it almost a hundred per cent. I got drunk once in a while, but rarely, rarely did I really get falling down, stumbling drunk. Because I did have a job to do, and I did it. It was a responsible job, with some dignity, I think. I was a conductor on a passenger train, and I had a responsibility, and it was a lot of writing and a work to do: collecting cash fares, things of that nature.

Some alcoholics are binge drinkers, going on periodic benders of drinking to blackout or unconsciousness. Others are maintenance drinkers: As Submarine Bill C. once described this in his own submariner's lingo, he himself would go through the day drinking small amounts in the effort to maintain the psychological and emotional equivalent of "zero float." On a submarine at sea that means carefully adjusting the relative volume of air and water in the flotation tanks so that the vessel can hang suspended below the water, at the depth you have chosen, with neutral buoyancy, neither trying to rise to the surface nor sink to the bottom.

For an alcoholic this style of drinking means taking a little sip every once in while, trying to dull your mind just enough to block out your overpowering fear or anxiety or guilt or sense of doom or anger and rebellion, but not enough to keep you from being able to think clearly enough to do your job. Ed Pike was that kind of alcoholic. He was almost never visibly drunk.

But I could not have gone to work without a drink, I couldn't have started the day without a drink, and I couldn't have gone without a bottle in my bag. Railroaders traditionally live in a bag of some kind, and I always had a

bottle in my bag. But, as I say, I controlled it well. I couldn't be without it, and still I rarely got drunk.

I'm not a person who tried to quit a thousand times — I only tried to quit twice in my life — that I really, sincerely, desperately wanted never to take another drink. The first time it only lasted five days, and the second time it lasted fifty-nine days. So why did I start [back drinking again]? Especially after that two-month period . . . fifty-nine day period. That was in 1946, and I was not miserable, I was not sick, I wasn't unhappy. As a matter of fact, as I look back on my life, that was probably the happiest two months in my life, up to that point in time. I had been married for four years, and I just got acquainted with my wife during that two month period, and she — not Jenny, incidentally — my first wife, she came to A.A. when I did. She's a recovered alcoholic, a recovering alcoholic.

I heard something cute at the hospital last month. [A doctor] said there is no more such a thing as a recovered alcoholic than there is a recovered virgin! [*Laughter*] Heh, heh, I thought that was spelling it out pretty clearly! We are recovering — we are not recovered, and we will never be recovered — at least, they haven't found a way up to this point.

Anyhow, when the day came — why I started to drink after that fifty-nine days, I did not know — I know now, but I didn't know then. And from then on, until I did come to A.A., life was very, very unhappy for me because I believed that since I *knew* how desperately I wanted never to drink again, and since I *did* drink again, that I must be hopelessly and helplessly insane. This is what I thought, this is what I believed, and I worried every day for fear that someone — the people next door, or on the job, or whatever — would discover that I am insane, and they would throw the net over me and take me away.

And that, of course, to my way of teaching — I'm a Polack, and to us, the worst form of degradation was to be insane, to lose your mind. And at that time, there really wasn't the phrase "mental health" or "mental illness" — it hadn't come into much being then. In fact, it didn't come into being until the early 50's. Then you were *insane*, and they took you not to a mental hospital, but to an *insane asylum*, and you rarely came out. Well, I lived with this fear for the next seven or eight months — but still, I had to drink, I could not go without drinking. But when the day came that the first drink that I had to have in the morning wiped me out, made me drunk — there was a moment of decision there.

[This was the work of] God — although I did not know him then, he apparently knew me — because he gave me the grace to realize that I had reached a point where I had to make a decision. As I said, I was married, I had a beautiful young wife, and a three-year-old baby girl, and I was so proud. I was comparatively an old man — I was thirty-eight years old when Penny was born. And I thought I invented babies, I was so proud and all, and man oh man! — here I am, I can't *drink* anymore. If one drink makes me drunk? — I was given the grace to understand that I had to do something.

A.A. people most frequently assume a synergistic doctrine of grace in the way they talk about the role God plays in their lives: God and a human being *co-operating* to bring about the person's redemption.<sup>54</sup> But it is a system where God's grace is always *prevenient* (that is, it is always fundamentally God who is taking the initiative and being the leader, while we are but followers). First God must reach down to touch us — to nudge us, make us aware, or show us an opportunity — at a time and place, and in a manner, which God chooses, not us. The human being must then co-operate

with this grace in order for it to accomplish its purpose, so that we can then spend our lives continually growing from grace to grace and “from glory to glory.” But the human being is asked to do very little indeed by comparison with what God is doing. In A.A., God asks the person to go to meetings even when they do not feel like it, and asks them to make themselves say at least a short prayer when they get up in the morning and before they go to bed at night, and asks them to do some reading every day in the Big Book (or *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* or some other piece of good A.A. literature), and a few other things which can hardly be described as heroic efforts of “works righteousness”!

The hardest act of will that recovering people eventually have to learn to carry out on their side is, paradoxically, the willing of non-willing. “Letting go and letting God” means that I must decide, in this particular concrete situation, not to try to will my own will. But even here, there is no way human beings can, by their own natural unaided powers, will not to will their own will. So I must call upon the power of God’s grace to give me the borrowed strength to will (at least a little bit!) not to will my own will, so that I can stand aside in a spirit of confident serenity and let God work.

In this dynamic, synergistic process of going on from grace to grace and from glory to glory, the first act of God’s grace, at the very beginning of the path, is God acting to open my eyes to the desperateness of my plight. Ed suddenly realized that he was in real trouble — trouble so bad, that he *had to do something*, anything, no matter how difficult or frightening or humiliating.

There is an old theological catch-phrase: “all real grace is free grace, but there is no such thing as cheap grace.” At the time, Ed felt so awful and so terrible, and was in so much inner pain, that he could not stand it. Years later, he realized that the tormenting agony he had felt at that time was in fact the kindly hand of a loving God

extended to him in the first of an unending sequence of acts of grace, and that the first stage of that process, no matter how painful it was for him at the very beginning, was necessary to bring him ultimately into a new life of freedom and joy.

Now, I did not know anything about Alcoholics Anonymous. I had never read anything about it. Of course, it wasn't as public as it is today — on the television, radio, newspapers, whatever. It's difficult to pick up any magazine today without reading at least one article on alcohol or drug abuse or whatever.

But I knew that something had to be done. So I — Bobby was still asleep, and when she woke up, I remember I told her, "Look, I'll buy you booze just as long as I can, but as for me, I'm gonna quit." And I'll never forget her reaction, because she grabbed me and just hung on and said, "I'm so glad to hear you say that, because I want to quit, and I know I can't do it by myself." And that kind of stunned me, because it had never occurred to me that I could have stopped, maybe, if I had any help. I mean, we just didn't know about such things.

The only time that I had heard the phrase Alcoholics Anonymous was just a few days — well maybe a couple of weeks — after Penny was born, and we were living in a flat in Fort Wayne, and I was working on the Pennsylvania Railroad at the time. And the landlady that owned the building lived in the back apartment, and we lived in the front apartment, and she would stop in and play with the baby for a minute. She was a real nice person, and one morning she stopped and sat down on the sofa beside me, and all of a sudden she turned to me and she says, "Ed, why don't you try Alcoholics Anonymous?" And I thought, you know, well, I couldn't figure out what she was talking about — here it was, almost nine o'clock in the morning, and I

hadn't had a drink yet! And so, you know, that is the only time that I ever heard that phrase Alcoholics Anonymous.

I had not read — there had been three, no, two real good articles published prior to my coming to A.A. One of 'em — I've since read 'em, of course — one was in 1939 in the old *Literary Digest*, and the other one, of course (we have copies around now,) Jack Alexander's article in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1941. But, somehow or other, I did not read those articles. I can't understand why, because I am a reader, and I'm sure that I must have read those magazines. But I didn't read those articles. And maybe it's just as well, because I don't think I would have been ready at any rate.

In Ed Pike's story, just as in some of the previous stories in these two volumes, we see the kinds of "odd coincidences" that appear when alcoholics recount the tale of how they came to A.A. There is no way one could argue with a determined skeptic that these were anything other than blind chance. But if it is true that "when the student is ready the teacher will appear," it seems also equally true that the information that will save us will only appear when we *are* ready, and not one moment sooner. Ed had never run into any of the better known articles about A.A. which had appeared, like the famous one by Jack Alexander in the *Saturday Evening Post* which had come out six years earlier. But when he was finally ready, God made sure that a tiny article appeared buried on a back page of the local Elkhart newspaper.

So, anyhow, I didn't take a drink and neither did Bobbie — it was about two weeks, something like that, I don't remember exactly — and I got a letter from the Internal Revenue Department, and they told me that I owed 'em some money, and man, that really, you know, pulled my

bobber under, because I didn't know, you know, what to do. I don't know why I got so excited over that letter, 'cause, hell, I'd had four or five just like it — you know, previously — and they hadn't bothered me.

But this time, it really shook me, and being an alcoholic, the first thing I could think of was to go get a drink! Not that we alcoholics believe that a drink will remove the problem — no, we're not that stupid. But like Scarlett O'Hara ["Tomorraah is anotheah day"] we'll think about it tomorrow!

But I had a problem — I didn't know how I was gonna go get *me* a drink, and I didn't have enough money to bring home a bottle, and I was literally afraid to go get *me* a drink and not bring some home, for Bobbie. Now, none of you here know her, of course, but she was about five foot one, and weighed about eighty-five pounds soaking wet, with her winter underwear on, but I was literally afraid of her.

And so, I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to go get this bottle, and I'm reading the newspaper, because, as I said, I am a reader. I'm a compulsive reader. And I was reading the Elkhart *Truth* (we had in the meantime moved to Elkhart) and I found this little story, way back on maybe page thirteen or fourteen, about Alcoholics Anonymous here in Elkhart — that A.A. had grown to such numbers that they had to have three closed meetings a week, in order that everyone would have the opportunity to get to a closed meeting.

Because at that time, all the closed meetings were in homes — we took turns having them in our homes — and there was very few homes in Elkhart that could accommodate more than, you know, ten, twelve people at the most. The first closed meeting I ever attended, there were thirteen of us there, and two of 'em sat on the floor, because Brenda didn't have that many chairs.

Before this, Ed *was not ready yet*. The sequence of God's graces had already begun however, so that he had already begun along the providentially-guided path of *getting ready to be ready*. But he had now finally arrived at the crucial point: *he was ready*, and so God in his grace (how? no one in A.A. has ever figured out how God could arrange things like this) made sure that *this time* his eye was strangely drawn to that little obscure article, and he read it, and somehow understood without consciously understanding why, that he had to contact these people. It was an uncanny and (at that point in time) irresistible urge to do something totally different from anything he had ever done before.

What does God's grace "feel like" when you receive it? Sometimes (perhaps most of the time) it comes in ways of which you are never consciously aware at the time. It is only long afterwards that you sometimes suddenly realize that God kept something catastrophically bad from happening to you which (in the natural order of events) should have happened to you, or that God gave you a wonderful gift even if at the time you were not consciously aware of the marvelous generosity he had shown in giving you that gift, so that you were not sufficiently grateful for it in the way you should have been. Sometimes it comes in the form of intolerable agony and inner pain, as when God opened Ed's eyes to the desperateness of his drinking problem.

But sometimes it comes in the form of an inexplicable, irresistible urge which can be *felt* but not rationally explained.<sup>55</sup> This was what was happening now. It made no sense to him, but at the *feeling* level, he sensed somehow that he *had* to do what he did next, and he was not going to be let off the hook. Some external power had entered his mind and was taking over his actions, but in such a way that it felt to him like *he himself* simply *had to* perform

this action, no matter how strange it seemed, and no matter how little sense it made that he felt so irresistibly compelled to do it.

So, anyhow, when I read that story, I immediately got the urge to write a note — it had the post office box number, the same one we're using today. And I remember what I wrote: I simply said that I'm forty years old, and I am interested. You know, uh, what do I do? And all the time I'm thinking that I *will* go, I will drop this in the post office, and I will *still* go across the street — Charlie Russell's — and get me a bottle. Because I'd figured it out, how I was gonna do that. We lived on East Washington Street in a little furnished apartment, and I walked to the old post office, at Jackson and Main, and dropped that note in the post box . . . . . and I turned around and went back home. It just seemed like that monkey had been lifted off my back, just by that one physical act of writing that note.

Ed's action — he came back home without getting the bottle of liquor — showed that he somehow *knew* at some level that the answer to the whole problem of his life had now been given to him, and that he had *co-operated* by accepting that proffered gift, and that he did not need the liquor any longer. We are talking about *feelings*, and things somehow *sensed*, and *intuitions* that seem to operate in part below the level of consciousness and deliberate intentionality, and that cannot be explained rationally in the natural order of events.

It accomplishes nothing to appeal to notions of "subconscious knowledge." There was simply no information about Alcoholics Anonymous in that tiny little bare-bones article in the Elkhart *Truth* sufficient to account for Ed's subsequent actions, whether the information was processed primarily down at the subconscious level, or analyzed up at the level of the conscious, rational ego.

A.A. starts to work only when we abandon any notion of trying to explain *how* we could feel or sense or intuit certain things in terms of contemporary natural science and current psychological theories, and become willing to notice what we can somehow “see” with the eyes of the spirit, and become willing to listen to what we can somehow “hear” with the ears of the spirit, and become willing to feel what we can somehow “touch” with the fingertips of the spirit, and then to let go of our conscious fears and apprehensions and *let ourselves act on it*.

We must remember that a baby still in the womb could never “explain,” on its experiences of what was and was not “possible” within the dark confines of its imprisoning walls of flesh, what it will be able to see once it is born into the world of light. And we must also remember that our human free will allows us — even when the light is turned on and when something is stuck right in front of our faces — to react only with fear and shut our eyes.

A person can spend his whole life, walking through a world illuminated by the sunlight of the spirit, and fearfully keeping his eyes shut — and arguing vehemently that what he glimpsed when he opened his eyelids a fraction once in his life was obviously a hallucination or self-delusion — and stumbling over things and hurting himself as though he were locked in a world of perpetual darkness even as he moves through the realm of perpetual light.

Ed did the right thing. He acted instead of trying to figure it all out first. And then, in totally human fashion, he forgot about it completely! But God hadn’t, and had set the wheels in motion for the next gift of grace.

Well, it was two or three days before I got any action on that, and two fellows came to call, and I went to the door, and I looked up, and here’s two guys, and they said, “Guess

you know why we're here." And it didn't ring any bell, at the moment, because they didn't look like, you know, anybody connected with any drinking problem. I thought, if anything, they might be a couple of dicks [policemen], but I couldn't, you know, think of anything I had done that wouldn't have been outlawed by the statute of limitations!

So, anyhow, one of 'em said, "We got your letter." O.K. now! "Come on in, I know who you are now."

So they came in, they sat down. One of 'em, I don't think he said five words all the time he was there. But the other guy, he told me what a terrible drinker he had become, and he said, it got to the point where he had been drinking almost a pint of whiskey a day for nearly two weeks. And I thought, "Uh oh," you know, I got a little sinking feeling in my stomach. Because I thought, well, maybe this does work for somebody who drinks a pint a day for two weeks, but the fact of the matter is, that for over seven months I had been drinking around two pints a day every day — every day! And I just *knew* that there was nobody in this world that drank that much.

I was *ashamed* of it — I *lied* about it. If we went to the Moose, or the Eagles, we'd set at a table and I would walk to the can, and I would stop at the bar and grab a quick double, and maybe on the way back stop and grab a shot. Why, I didn't need to do that! I could a had it brought to the table — Bobbie would not have scolded me — you know, what the hell, [the money I was spending,] it was mine! But I really was ashamed of my drinking, those last few months that I drank. So I thought that no one in this world drank that much. Hell, I found out, after I got in A.A., that some people, you know, *spilt* more than that every day, more than I drank! [*Laughter*]

This is one of the distinguishing symptoms of alcoholism: You try not to let any other human being, even your spouse, know how

much you are really drinking. If a doctor or psychotherapist asks you how much you drink you lie your head off: “Oh, maybe one or two drinks in the evening to relax, you know.”

We can try our best to scrunch our eyelids shut, and stick our fingers in our ears so that we can neither see nor hear nor use our fingertips to feel what is in front of us, but this spiritual faculty of *feeling* and *sensing* and *intuiting* continues to operate anyway, and what we end up feeling is a deep sense of inner humiliation and shame. If you open up your life to the sunlight of the spirit, the festering infected place inside starts to heal rapidly, and you start moving into a world of serenity, peace, freedom, and joy. But if you continue to try your best to shut your eyes, the power of the light still shines redly through your eyelids, and what you feel instead is a sense of unbearable shame that makes you just try to clench your eyelids tighter. Only clenching up even more never works — the shame and sense of failure and despair just get worse.

As Ed Pike went on to point out, it is therefore not some precisely measured scientific amount of “so many fluid ounces of beverage alcohol consumed per hundred pounds of body weight” that makes an alcoholic an alcoholic, it is how you are drinking it, what you are trying to do to your mind by drinking it, and what it does to you in terms of the actual behavior that follows.

Regardless of [the quantity], it’s not how much you drink, as I said in the beginning, or how often — it’s what it does to you. If you can’t guarantee your behavior after you start drinking — you got a problem.

And I certainly had a problem, because I never could go a day without a drink. I tried it, many times, and I’d swear that I would not take a drink today, because I had a very important meeting that I had to attend, and hell, in two or

three hours at the most, “Aw, I gotta have a drink.” And that was the story of my life.

Anyhow, this guy told me that there would be a meeting Saturday night at the Episcopal Church, where we’re having our meetings now on Saturday nights, and, “Be there,” you know. He didn’t say we’ll come and get you, we’ll meet you, or anything. “If you want it, be there.” So I thanked him, and they went away.

Well, I had not told Bobbie that I wrote that letter, but she was very happy that I did. And so, when Saturday came, which was three or four days later, I asked her if she wanted to go to that meeting, and she said, “Well, yeah, if you want to go.”

I said, “Well, I’ll see if we can get a baby sitter,” because if we didn’t have money enough for a baby sitter, we didn’t have money enough to go out. And I’m glad that I can say that even about our drinking. Of course, we could take her up to the Moose at that time, but even so, we’d usually go home eight or nine o’clock, because she was just a child — she wasn’t three years old.

And anyhow, we did get a baby sitter, and we went to the meeting. And we got there early, because we couldn’t remember whether they said the meeting started at 8 or 8:30, and we didn’t want to make an entrance, so we got there for an eight o’clock meeting when the meeting was at 8:30. Anyhow, there was only one individual there. If there’d been nobody there, I don’t know, we might a turned around and went home.

But there was one person there — now God must a told him to be there, or something. He’s since dead, he’s one of the poor unfortunates that never really was able to get this program. But he was sitting near the back stairs there, and we walked around, and got by ’em, and he looked up at us. He never said, “Hi,” “Hello,” nothing. And he looked to be the most unhappy looking person I had ever seen, and it

almost scared me out, because I'd had, I thought, was my share of unhappiness, and I didn't feel like I wanted to buy any more.

To keep him from bolting and running after he got there a half hour too early, God in his providence arranged to have a single person there. This was in fact a miserable, unhappy man who subsequently drank himself to death. But God uses everyone and everything as part of the plans he sets up to get those who will finally accept his grace into the place where he wants them to be. In order to make this happen, God can even use people who totally reject him to carry out positive roles in certain parts of his overall work of grace.

This was something that struck St. Augustine over and over again when he wrote his *Confessions*. That was the famous autobiography written by the great African saint who lived at the beginning of the middle ages, the figure whose ideas had such a profound influence on Bill Wilson. In this book Augustine mused about the effect various people had had on him in his early life, and he realized in hindsight that the hand of God's grace had been at work everywhere, even in situations where he himself had been totally unaware that God was watching out for him and making sure that the story could be finished with a happy ending for him. And it was sometimes the case, Augustine realized as he was telling his life story, that there had been people who had in fact been agents of God's grace, whose own human motives were sordid or unworthy, or who were people who were unfortunately going to end up taking the wrong path themselves. God had been able to use those people too.

But regardless, I did stay, and pretty soon other people started to come in, and they come in at opposite ends from where we were, and we could have made a quick exit if we

wanted to. But I keep looking at 'em, and they were all, you know, dressed up, clean-shaven, sober, happy, laughing, joking, shaking hands.

And one of 'em I knew, I recognized — I knew who he was. I'd never done any drinking with him, because he was a very prominent attorney here in town, and I was not in his league at all. But I did know who he was, and I knew of his drinking pattern, and I remember saying to Bobbie, "If this thing works for him, it must be pretty good!"

This was Willard Chester, of course, the prominent lawyer for the railroad, which was why Ed knew who he was. Willard was used by God's grace to play a crucial role in bringing both Ed Pike and Ellen Lantz into the program, two staunch and loyal A.A. people who were going to play an important role in building up Elkhart A.A. and making it grow.

And someone must have told him that it was a new fish gonna be there that night, because he almost broke the tables down getting to me to shake my hand, and tell me how glad he was that I was there. And believe it or not, people, that was the first time in my life that anyone had ever told me they were glad to see me, and made me feel that they meant it. I really believed that he meant it. And he introduced us to his wife, and they took us around, introduced us to all the people. We didn't remember any names, of course, but whatever, every one of them just gave me that feeling that they were honestly glad that we were there.

What happened next shows even further the uncanny way in which dozens of different strands are woven together at the right time and place by the hand of God's providence. There was a

reason, Ed realized later, why God had wanted him to be ready to come in on that particular Saturday evening.

So, lo and behold, the speaker [Bill Mollenhour] was one of the very few people — I don't think they was five people [in A.A.] in this whole area, within fifty miles or more — that was younger than I was. And I was forty years old. And there just weren't any young people. And that's one of the biggest thrills that I have today, is to see so many young people who have the privilege and the opportunity of gaining so much more happiness out of life. But whatever, he was from Warsaw, and he was editor of a newspaper [the *Warsaw Times-Union*], he flew his own plane.

He just inspired *confidence*: he made me believe what he said. And that was a new experience to me, because I never believed anybody — I thought everybody was as dishonest as I was. But I believed what Bill said that night. And it made me want to discover whatever else there was to it.

There were two important things that happened here. First of all, we see how honesty is one of the vital keys. Alcoholics come into A.A. having known only a world (since earliest childhood) of manipulation and deception, of no-talk rules and blatant denial of the obvious — endlessly trying to puzzle their way out of a topsy-turvy world of endlessly confusing and misleading words that bear little or no resemblance to anything that is really going on. Over and over again, significant people in their lives told them things that were not true at all.

Once A.A. people are thoroughly involved in the fellowship, they try their best never to lie to one another about program issues, because they know that the only chance anyone in the group has for survival against this fatal disease is to tell the honest truth about

what works and what does not — and who I really am so you can make an honest evaluation of whether what works for me might help you too. For the first time in his life, Ed encountered that kind of real, no-holds-barred honesty. It was like a blessed whiff of fresh air, and more than anything in the world, he wanted to find out what that totally honest man had in fact found out.

The second important thing is that Ed was able to feel faith for the first time. In the New Testament, the word *pistis*, which is usually translated “faith,” does not mean belief in the correctness of some intellectualized set of complex doctrines and dogmas, it simply means trust, or as Ed puts it here, confidence. It is a *feeling* term, not an intellectualized term. We remember that Ellen Lantz said at the end of her lead, “You can *feel* love. You can just *sense* it every time. I’ve become more aware of that.” And the same thing applies to the spirit of honesty. You can *feel* it and *sense* it, and what results from that is *pistis*, that is, confidence or a fundamental feeling of trust.

*Pistis* is the supporting foundation stone underlying all our hopes; the awareness of what we feel and sense to be true and real within the invisible realm of the spirit.<sup>56</sup> —  
*Hebrews 11:1*

It is NOT a blind jump into the darkness. The confidence that Ed was suddenly able to feel was based on something that he could sense in the young newspaper editor’s way of speaking to the group, something that was real and external to his own subjectivity, and actually out there. And as a result of that strange sense of confidence which the young newspaper editor inspired in him, Ed for the first time felt HOPE.

The confidence he felt was not yet faith in God *per se*. Ed had no faith in God at that point, in the sense of feeling confident that the

invisible God loved him and would help him. As far as he could tell, it was merely this particular human being in whom he was able to feel some unusually strong confidence, he did not know why. But the honesty of the speaker was something greater than we human beings can ever accomplish by our own natural powers — this kind of honesty is simply too frightening, and we could never allow ourselves to be naked and vulnerable that way by our own unaided strength — and so, whether Ed realized it or not, he was sensing and feeling in that simple human honesty the power of God authentically at work, allowing a mere human being to surpass his natural human limitations and render himself transparent to God's message of hope for the hopeless. Ed was seeing a real live miracle taking place before his very eyes, and at some level he *intuited* the uncanny nature of what he was beholding and saw it as a power for salvation. Ed had encountered one of the God-bearers, one of the living embodiments of the divine Word of truth and hope and love, who serve as channels of the divine grace in spite of and in the midst of their human frailties.

The message of hope which Ed authentically heard in his heart was God speaking to him, the all-powerful spirit of the Living God pouring out of an earthen vessel of human clay, and spilling out its healing truth and love and light onto Ed Pike's soul. Ed did not realize it at all, at the upper level of his consciousness, but in his heart he had found God.

## Chapter 13

# God Knew Me Although I Didn't Know Him

Ed had now gone to his first A.A. meeting, the open Saturday night meeting at St. John's Episcopal Church in Elkhart, sometime early in 1947. He was forty years old, could not stop drinking, and like many people when they first come to A.A., he was scared to death that he was going insane. Also, like many newcomers, being told that he was not insane but an alcoholic was an enormous relief. The feeling that your mind is literally disintegrating, and that either you or the world around you has become totally insane, is so frightening that only those who have experienced the plunge into that snake pit, can understand how bad it is. Being told that you are simply an alcoholic, and that this is something that can be treated effectively, is like the damned suddenly discovering a ladder leading up out of hell.

By the time the meeting was over, he had gained some hope and confidence that these people had the answer he was looking for, and that he was not doomed, and he decided on the spot to jump in with both feet. If he was going to do it, he was going to do it all the way.<sup>57</sup>

So they announced that there were these three closed meetings now: one on Tuesday night, one on Wednesday night, and one on Thursday night. Well, I was associated with two groups of people [outside of A.A.] — I was the secretary of one group that met on a Thursday night every month; another group met on a Tuesday night every month. So I became a Wednesday-nighter, because I didn't want anything to interfere with A.A. I was gonna be a regular person — that's how bad I wanted to stop drinking.

At his first house meeting the next Wednesday, Ed was thrown back into a panic again. He had in fact discovered God the preceding Saturday night, but he was not aware at the conscious level that it was in fact God at work whom he had felt and sensed so strongly.

We are given so many screwy images of God and his work in our society, often totally infantile and childish, that when we first encounter the real God in action, we frequently do not realize consciously that it is him whom we are meeting face to face. And it is unfortunate, but all too many of the churches and synagogues and mosques and temples and other religious institutions, confuse us more than they help us at this stage in our spiritual development. Alcoholics and addicts and Al-Anons and so on, need to go to twelve step meetings when they first come into the program, not churches and places like that, to discover the real God. If you cannot recognize authentic spirituality in a good twelve step context, you are not going to be able to recognize it any place else, where it is going to be far more deeply hidden if it is present at all, and obscured by extraneous things which can easily lead people totally astray.

Now at the first closed meeting that I went to, the chairman, he spoke for about ten or fifteen minutes, and mostly on this God business, and it scared me. Not that I

have ever been an atheist — I have *not* — but I never in my life ever felt a moment's feeling of any [direct personal] relationship with God — “higher power” — whatever you want to call him. I knew the answers in the catechism, because I was brought up in the Roman church, and I could probably answer most of the questions in the catechism tonight, and I haven't looked at it in sixty years or more.

But there's a difference — I mean, I knew the [catechism] answer, but never in my life did I ever have a feeling of faith in God, and I didn't have when I came to A.A., and naturally, I thought, well, if you have to believe in God to get sober, well then, I'm doomed, I'm done, you know.

In other words, there is a tremendous difference between two different meanings of that word “faith,” and Ed had faith in the first of those meanings, but thought that he did not have faith in the second sense of the word:

1. Faith as belief that a being called God exists, and the ability to state and affirm, in the precise, officially correct words, the intellectualized and verbally conceptualized doctrines about God taught by my own religious denomination. This kind of faith may include powerful emotions connected with this concept of God which the person experiences when in church or participating in a religious observance.

2. Faith as direct awareness of a deep personal relationship with God here and now, including a real confidence or trust in God which is in part based on things sensed or intuited at the pure feeling level, and is in part based on specific, concrete things which I know that God has already done for me personally.

Ed was a very sharp man, and he caught the distinction between those two different uses of the word faith within the first ten or fifteen minutes he was there. Currently, many people in A.A. in the St. Joseph river valley area make the same distinction by referring to having faith in the first sense as having a “religion” and having faith in the second sense as entering the realm of “spirituality.” They emphasize to newcomers that A.A. is only concerned with spirituality, not religion. The Methodist leader John Wesley in the eighteenth century, one of the two major theoreticians at the beginning of the modern evangelical movement, made the same basic distinction by making a contrast between (1) “formal religion,” along with the mere “outward form of religion,” which never saved anybody, he said, and (2) true “inward religion” and “the religion of the heart.” This meant the same thing exactly as the A.A. terminology which distinguishes between religion and spirituality. Many of the roots of the twelve step program lay in the evangelical movement, via the Oxford Group and the Southern Methodist publication called *The Upper Room* and other such sources,<sup>58</sup> so that in a way, the twelve step movement was a revival of many of the fundamental principles of spiritual recovery which all too many of the contemporary evangelical churches had forgotten and obscured with doctrinal disputes and legalistic rules and empty emotionalism produced by psychological manipulation.

Ed did not know that what he had experienced at the Saturday night open meeting at the intuitive and feeling level — the spirit of love and total honesty, and the feelings of new hope and confidence which this inspired in him — was in fact the basic underlying substance of the living relationship with God’s continuous presence which was faith in the second sense given above.

A physician at the meeting (it must have been either Jack Swihart or Art Kissner) saved the day by giving Ed an interim-

position he could handle. If he had no living faith of the second sort, at least at the level of conscious awareness, then God would accept, in lieu of that, *a sincere and honest desire* for that kind of faith. And Ed followed their instructions and consistently prayed to God and asked God for help even though he did not consciously feel anything special happening. This is important — the most significant work going on in the human psyche during this kind of spiritual transformation is usually taking place far below the level of normal conscious awareness.

But another fellow that was there, a doctor, made a statement that really saved me. He said that the next best thing to having faith was to have a desire for faith. Well, God must have known that I had a desire for whatever I needed in order to learn whether I could live and function, produce, without drinking. And so I just made a deal with myself, that I will do anything that they tell me they do — anything — and if I'm big enough, I'll do it.

They said that, you know, you should ask God to help you. And I did that. And I felt foolish when I did it, because, you know, it didn't ring any bells or anything. They said, you know, read the Big Book. I personally didn't read the Big Book so much, but Bobbie did — she would read it, and we would talk about it. And I even started listening to her, you know — boy, there's a big change!

So my life started to change right from the beginning, although I wasn't really aware of it. We'd only been in A.A. oh, let's see, three months, something like that. We went back to Ft. Wayne on a visit, and I visited with a conductor that I had broke for, for over three years. And after visiting with him for about thirty minutes, I walked out to his car with him, and he said to me, he says, "Ed, I feel like I just met you today for the first time." Well, I was

not aware that any such change had come over me, could be discernible by anybody else. But obviously, he saw something, or he wouldn't have said such a thing.

But I did do everything that they told me to do.

The fact that the whole feeling-tone of his actions and behavior towards others was changing so drastically that everyone around him was noticing it —and especially the fact that it was without him being consciously aware of it himself at first — showed the truly profound changes that had taken place, and were continuing to take place, in the core of his inner being.

And the fact was that *Ed did have faith*, the kind of faith that actually saves. In the New Testament, when writers like the apostle Paul or the author of the epistle to the Hebrews searched for an example of saving faith, they turned again and again, not to any contemporary Christian figure, but to the Old Testament figure of Abraham, the father of the Jewish faith. There Abraham was, a homeless nomad living in a tent out in the semiarid wastelands of what is today the country of Iraq, when he received only the vaguest of orders from God to head out somewhere southward, into the trackless deserts which led towards Syria and Palestine, with no details, no complex instructions, and no knowledge at all of what was really going to happen or the ultimate outcome. And Abraham had the “faith,” or the courage, or whatever you wish to call it, to plunge into the totally unknown.

Real faith is always a homeless nomad bravely marching out into the trackless desert, into the mystery of the unknown — guided only by the sense, somehow, that he marches at the command of some strange higher power whom he will have to depend on to tell him, at each new stage, what to do as his immediate next step. Just to *trust in God and do the next right thing*, that is the faith of the nomad, the

faith of the pilgrim searching for the way to heaven, the faith of the knight seeking the Holy Grail.

The pervasive distorting influence of some of the more flamboyant mid-twentieth-century “evangelists” (as they called themselves) was still badly confusing Ed however. These were the people whom the Methodist leader John Wesley in the eighteenth century had contemptuously referred to as the “hot gospelers” who ranted and raved from the pulpit and tried to turn everything into emotionalism and psychological manipulation. Ed was confused because, as he put it, his prayers to God “didn’t ring any bells or anything.” And he was afraid that meant that he was not doing it right. In other words, like most alcoholics and addicts and troubled people when they first enter the twelve step program, Ed really thought at one level that the kind of faith experience they must be talking about was an ecstatic entry into earthshaking emotions and fantasy experiences and wild euphoria — like really good mind-altering drugs, except you couldn’t get arrested if the cops found you with a prayer book open on the front seat of your car!

In fact, Ed had already experienced at the feeling level some truly transforming spiritual experiences: the feeling of sitting under a sentence of absolute doom and the knowledge somehow that he had to become willing *to do anything that had to be done* to save himself, followed by the inexplicable inner urge coming out of nowhere, where he simply *had* to write to the A.A. people on the spot, and then the strange automatic disappearance of his intention to buy a bottle of liquor on the way home. There was the sensing of a spirit of love and gladness and honesty at the Saturday night meeting (a feeling of a strange new sort which he had never experienced in his life before), and the confidence and new hope that arose in his heart as a response, and plunged him into the program with total dedication expressed in real action and concrete, committed activity.

The real God works quietly most of the time, not noisily, but he gets the job done. The real God most frequently prefers unobtrusive anonymity to public showboating. He would make a really good A.A. member! In the case of a lot of prayers we address to him, God hears the plea and starts his work of answering that prayer, but does not feel it necessary to give any kind of “zing” back the other way to signal “message received.” In part, faith that God does hear all my prayers will emerge as I learn from repeated experience, over and over again, that if I just pray and wait for God to do it the *right* way (which sometimes takes preparation and time), things in my external life will start changing dramatically.

This was what was happening to Ed Pike: his external behavior was totally changing. Other people were responding to him now in a very different way, because of the change in the inner attitudes of his heart which they could feel or sense or intuit, immediately on contact with him.

I'd say, you know, “God help me not to drink today,” and by golly, it worked! *He evidently knew me although I didn't know him.*

Ed Pike made essentially the same statement earlier in this lead as well. It was an important discovery for him. The power that got him through the earliest stages of his spiritual journey came from the fact that God knew him even though he didn't know God. Ed was referring to a famous passage from the Hymn to Love in 1 Corinthians 13, one of the mainstays of meditation and discussion in earliest A.A., at the end of verse 12:

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but *then shall I know even as also I am known.*

At the beginning of the true spiritual path, all we really seem to know of God are distorted images of him, reflected in the mirror of other people's words — a maze of metaphors and symbols and enigmatic riddles, where we see other people who seem confident that they have solved these riddles, but where we ourselves feel lost without a clue.

And so we can be tempted to panic, or to fall into despair. What Ed was trying to say, was that no one gets in the door of A.A. unless God led them in that door. Even if I am convinced that I do not have the foggiest idea who God is, he knows exactly who I am (warts and all). And the fact that I am sitting in my first A.A. meeting means that God has already concretely demonstrated that he loves me even now, just as I am, and that he has made a commitment to me, for as long as I want him.

The deeper experiences of the face-to-face intimately personal encounter with God will come at the right time, further down the spiritual path. And then I will in a sense know "who" God is in the same way that I "know" another human being with whom I have a truly open and mutually trusting personal relationship.

And newcomers will ask a good old-timer to explain what it is that he "knows" about who God is, which gives him such a profound serenity and such peaceful, quiet joy — it is clear to the newcomer that this knowledge seems to be imparting some quality to the good old timer's soul that makes him almost seem to glow. And he will say things that sound like enigmatic riddles and impenetrable metaphors, and seem in every second sentence to say the exact opposite of what he said in the first sentence!

Faith means trusting enough to keep on walking down that spiritual path, counting on God to slowly teach me a little bit here about who he really is, and a little bit more there about who he really

is. And one day, I will hear that same old-timer talking about God and the spiritual life, and every single word he is saying will make perfect sense to me! It's so simple and obvious, really — why couldn't I understand that when I first came into A.A.?

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But meanwhile, Ed was still working the early stages of the program, exactly the way newcomers are supposed to work it, and he continued to be startled by the way his life and his reactions to people were changing, even in areas which were totally unexpected.

And it wasn't too much later that I was furloughed from the railroad, and one experience that I'll share with you: I took a job with the state, examining drivers for drivers licenses. And I went to Goshen — I went one day a week — I would go to Goshen and examine people there, give 'em the drive test. And I ran into an old girlfriend of mine. We'd had a beautiful romance, years ago, when I was single. I was single a long, long time . . . . I never got married until I was thirty-six, I think, something like that. Anyhow, here this gal came up there and we went to a restaurant for lunch and we talked, and we talked, and we talked. And I just know — *I know* — that, you know, she expected more than that. And when we went back to the office, she made the remark, she says, "Well, no girl ever got a nicer turndown."

And I was mad at myself that whole afternoon! And then I remember when I walked in the door, there was another member of A.A. there, and I said to him, "I'm still mad — at *me*, you know." And I said, "Boy, don't you ask God to help you, if you don't want him to do it!" [*Laughter*] I'll never forget that, because that was a very vivid experience in my life. And so I still believe that, to

this day. Don't ask him to help you, if you don't want him to.

But the point that I'm trying to make here — and I'm wandering all over the place, because I sure as hell ain't no speaker — the point I'm trying to make is, you don't have to believe in God to get sober. On the other hand, if you *do* stay away from a drink for a reasonable length of time — with me it was a year (of course I'm pretty dumb) — but I was sober at least a year before I was given the gift of faith in God as I understand him. And so, that's the point that I was trying to make. Don't let that discourage you. If you don't have a faith in God today, don't let that discourage you from continuing one day at a time with your sobriety. And I do believe, since it was my experience, that faith will be given to you.

And as I remember hearing some place — and I'm quite sure it's in the Bible, although I'm not a Bible scholar — that faith is a *gift* from God. I didn't get it because I worked harder at it, or because I even had a greater desire for it. Certainly not because I was smarter, because I never even finished the tenth grade in school. So, you know, it is a gift. And today I do — *I do* — have a very childlike faith in God as I understand him.

Now I have many friends today who are members of the clergy, members of the cloth, and I would hesitate to describe to them my conception of God. I think most of 'em would be horrified if I did, but I am happy with it, I am contented with it. And that's what the Big Book says: "We came to believe in a power greater than ourselves." And whenever it refers to God anywhere in the Big Book, there's always that clause, "as we understand him."

It is very important what Ed said here. Coming from a pious Polish Catholic background, he nevertheless tells the newcomers: do not worry about what you think you were taught by the pastor or

priest or rabbi who taught you about God as a child. In fact, as any well-trained philosophical theologian will tell you, since no finite human words or concepts are in fact competent to describe the infinite God, the only *words* you will ever have to talk about it will be metaphors and symbols. That is the Great Tradition, going back for centuries and centuries, to St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Denis the Areopagite, St. Macarius the Homilist, Philo Judaeus, Maimonides, the medieval Islamic philosophers, a good part of the Hindu tradition (like Shankara and the *Bhagavad-Gita*), and so on. Since it is impossible to describe what God is in any kind of comprehensive literal language, you are better off picking appropriate metaphors and images that make deep sense to *you* and grab *you* down in your gut and heart in a way that will put you in real touch with God, and form *doors* which you can walk through into even deeper contact with the Living God.

Ellen Lantz came from a totally different background — a small, conservative, very strict Protestant bible church — and yet we heard her saying exactly the same thing in her rewriting of that church hymn at the end of her lead: “Take my feet, but not to trod, on another’s conception of thee, O God.” It is impossible to have an authentic contact with the real God unless I have worked it out for myself. But that means I cannot force my metaphors and concepts on you and do you any good at all. If I try to do that, and you are honest, you will frequently admit that you do not even understand what I am saying at all.

So if you come into A.A., and do not believe in God at all, do not be afraid or panicky, just get yourself involved in the program and listen. If you start coming out with ideas about God that you think your pastor or priest or rabbi would be shocked at, before you discard them, first see if, for you, they pass *the pragmatic test*: When you conceive of a Higher Power, for yourself, in that fashion,

do you see continual positive changes taking place in your life, in line with the promises of the A.A. program? Do you find yourself somehow becoming *more like* the people in the program who have the greatest serenity and quiet, dependable love?

The whole A.A. program is pragmatic to the core. It began when a small group of alcoholics got sober using a slight modification of the Oxford Group's rigorous version of Protestant evangelical teaching, coupled with (very soon) additional practices which were drawn from traditional Catholic spirituality, as well as from New Thought and the Southern Methodist tradition of *The Upper Room*. They tried all sorts of different things over the next few years, and took note of what actually worked for them in their own lives. But they also noticed that some traditional religious practices did not in fact appear to be necessary at all. Some among their number were not doing those things, but were still getting sober and gaining real serenity and love in their lives. So they removed those items from their list, because they intended it to be only an account of the bare minimum of things which had to be done to produce sobriety and serenity of spirit. From this came the Big Book.<sup>59</sup>

And as Ed points out, the “came to believe” step was the second one on their list of the steps which they had found to be necessary, not the first. One came to know God only *after* becoming involved in working the steps. People began the program knowing little or nothing about who God really was.

Or [it actually says in the Big Book] “*understood him.*” All the twelve steps are written in the past tense. They’re not commandments, they’re simply telling us *how they did it*. They said, *this is how we did it*. “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol,” and so forth and so on. And I noticed that, in the second step, “we *came* to believe,” and that gave me some encouragement too, because it doesn’t

say that we believed in God and therefore we got sober. It says “we *came* to believe.” And it gave me the courage to go on — although it wasn’t too difficult, I can’t say that I suffered a whole lot.

We didn’t have any Two Northwest programs — we didn’t have any kind of [hospitalization] program at the time. A couple of years later, we had a nice program down at Beatty Hospital, when it was first built in ’48. We could take a patient or an alcoholic down there who needed medical attention, and they would accept him and sign him in for ten days. He didn’t even have to stay ten days — no cost or anything.

And we had A.A. meetings down there. We tried to carry the message. And that’s all that I’m trying to do tonight, is just carry the message.

Ed finished his lead in very powerful fashion simply by telling a story about the time he did a twelfth step on an alcoholic whom the doctors had given up for dead. This is the way A.A. teaches: **“My story is my message.”** The point of this particular story was that it does not seem to matter how bad a shape you have gotten into as an alcoholic. It does not matter if everyone else in the world has given up on you, and you have finally totally given up on yourself. It does not matter how old you are. Every alcoholic coming into A.A. is in the same fundamental situation: no earthly power can save them any longer — no physicians, no psychiatrists, no pills. All any of us could do was to beg for a miracle.

Here is the good news: when you walk into that first A.A. meeting, you will find yourself in a room with real, living miracles. What is impossible with human beings is not impossible with God, who has all power. But let us allow Ed to tell the memorable story about that one man:

But you talk about miracles, I'll share one more story with you. This is true, this happened: a fellow from Laporte and I were walking, and we just walked into Washington Park in Michigan City. And there was a big clump of weeds or bushes or whatever, and there was a foot sticking out there, we could see it. So we were curious, and we looked in there, and sure enough, there was a guy who was passed out; he was surrounded all over with wine bottles. And he obviously was in desperate need of help of some kind.

So we didn't know what the hell to do with him, so we packed him in the car and took him down to Westville. Well, it was about ten thirty at night when we got there, and Dr. Vanden Bosch, the superintendent, was there, and he was going home, and he saw what we had, and he knew who we were and why we were there, and he said, "You guys wasted your time." He said, "He will not be alive in the morning."

Well he was sixty-nine years old, his name was Lefty — you might have heard his name sometime (you will, maybe) — and his home was in Michigan City but he had been exiled from his home. His family would have absolutely nothing to do with him. Well, he not only lived, he was reunited with his family, he baby-sat with his grandchildren.

[This was a man who] was absolutely friendless and almost dead, and he lived seven beautiful, happy years. And he really worked this A.A. program. He carried the message to that prison two or three times a week.

A lot of us have tried to do that. All we can do is carry the message, "stand up and testify," if you will [*chuckling*], that it does work. And if there's anybody here that thinks it won't, just give it a try!

And if you don't really want to stop drinking, then you're wasting your time. You shouldn't be here. You should be out there "living it up," "having fun."

I'm living it up *here*, having fun.

Thank you!

This is real life, this is real joy, this is real peace, this is real freedom, this is real strength. The story is the message, and the message is the story.

## Chapter 14

# Afterword

This last part was a railroad conductor's story. In these two volumes we have also heard the stories of a man who was not only a well-to-do factory owner but also a skilled writer and musician, a convict who had been brought up in an orphanage, a woman who owned a bar located across the street from an automobile factory, a professional gambler from St. Louis, a housewife who went to work as an accountant to make ends meet, and a school drop-out who quit after the second grade when he was only eight years old. All these people are dead now, and their lives remain in one sense locked back in an earlier era, the world of the United States in the 1940's and 50's and 60's — or so many readers might say to themselves.

So in what sense can their words and their messages still live today? The fact that a good man or woman is no longer with us here on this earth does not necessarily mean that this person's continuing influence and transforming power on other people's lives need have been lost —including their ability to reshape our own lives, if we heed and listen to them and let them teach us the way.

So in that light, perhaps one good way of ending this book is with a story that Bill C., the retired nuclear submarine commander, tells about how Ed Pike turned him around at one point. Submarine Bill had gotten sober under the care and guidance of another of the

famous old timers in the St. Joe river valley, Bill Peters, who had become his sponsor. Bill Peters then died of complications resulting from a blood clot which had gotten lodged in and had blocked a vital blood vessel, after he had lingered in a coma in the hospital for some time. By the time Submarine Bill came to the funeral home to see Bill Peters' body lying there in the coffin, he had fallen into a truly dark frame of mind. Submarine Bill tells what happened at that point, and what Ed Pike said to him:

Well, I come into the funeral home and I was very angry, and feeling sorry for myself, and it was pretty obvious because of my sullen mood. And I don't hide anger very well. You know, I glare at people, and [I'm] very confrontational.

And Ed says, "Hey, Bill! What's the matter with you?" And I turned around and just *glared* at him. Didn't say a word. As if to ask, why are you asking me *this*? I have just lost my best friend, and my sponsor, and you ask me what's wrong with me!

And he says, "Come over here, sit down, I want to talk to you." And I went and sat down, and sat alongside of him, and he said to me, he says . . . "Did Bill ever teach you anything?" You know, we didn't even discuss the fact that what was bothering me [was all this anger and self-pity]. He says, "Did Bill ever teach you anything?"

And I said, "Of course. He taught me everything I know."

And he says, "Do you *use* it?"

I said, "Every day."

And he says, "In what manners?"

I said, "Well, working with other people." I said, "In the way I do my program."

And he says, "Well, what's the matter with you?"

And I said, “Well, if you have to ask, I’m not gonna honor you with an answer to that question.”

And he said to me, he says, “Oh, you’re feeling sorry for yourself, ’cause Bill died?” And again I glared at him, wanting to jump up and grab him by the throat!

And he says, “Bill’s not dead.”

And I looked at him, I said, “What’s the *matter* with you? What are you saying?”

He says, “Bill’s not dead.”

I said, “What do you mean he’s not dead?” I said, “he’s laying up there.” And he says, “Naw, that’s just his body.” He says, “You just told me that you use things that he taught you every day of your life.” He says, “*He’s alive in you.*”

And that quick, the anger left me. And I got peace of heart and peace of mind. A very wise old man. And his years of sobriety showed through then. At that time he was over about forty-two, forty-one years sober.

And Ed Pike, who said these words to Submarine Bill so long ago, is not dead either — nor is Ken Merrill, or Nick Kowalski, or Jimmy Miller, or Bill Hoover, or Brownie, or Ellen Lantz, or Goshen Bill — as long as we let them teach us some of the things they learned in their own journey along the path of the spirit. These are *things that we can use every day of our lives*. When we use them, these good men and women still live.

They gave us their lives as a free gift. They asked nothing from us in return: neither money, nor power, nor even public honor and prestige. This is the divine mystery of all God’s acts of grace: the gift is totally free, but we must *use it* in our lives, and live it in our actions, and follow in trust wherever it leads, in order for it to bear its fruits of freedom, peace, joy, courage, and true satisfaction.

And past that, we can only bring this book to an end by giving thanks: to these people who taught us how to live, and above all to God, who gives to us unceasingly. May all creation bless him and thank him and may we be able to look with delight upon his glory for ever!

## **Appendix 1**

# **The Books the Good Old-Timers Read**

### **PART ONE. THE FIRST TWO PRINCIPLES**

#### **The Big Book**

In early A.A. in the St. Joseph river valley region, the book which completely surpassed all others in importance was always *Alcoholics Anonymous*, published in 1939 and referred to simply as the Big Book. In fact, it proved to be impossible to establish A.A. groups anywhere in Indiana until this work came out. One of the original Akron people actually came to Indiana in 1938, a year before the Big Book was printed. This was John D. Holmes (they called him “J.D.”), who had gotten sober in Akron in September 1936, and was the tenth person to get sober in the new A.A. movement.

When Dr. Bob’s son Smitty came to speak in South Bend at our annual Michiana Conference a few years ago, I got to eat dinner with him, and I asked him whether he recalled J. D. at all. Smitty smiled with delight as the old memories returned, and told me that he not only remembered him very well and very fondly, but that he had

been the one who had driven over and picked up J. D.'s wife Rhoda to bring her back to his parents' house when his father (Dr. Bob) made his first contact with the couple.

J. D. came to Indiana in 1938 after the newspaper in Akron which he worked for was sold and he was left jobless. His wife Rhoda had originally come from Evansville, Indiana, and they decided to make a trip to visit her family there for the Memorial Day holiday which came at the end of May. He found a new job on the newspaper there and they simply stayed and did not go back. Evansville was a city on the Ohio river in the southernmost part of the state. Although Rhoda was not an alcoholic, she and J. D. held something like an A.A. meeting every Wednesday night in their home in order to help him keep sober.

## **The Upper Room**

Like so many A.A.'s from the very early period, J. D. and Rhoda used an extremely popular devotional manual called *The Upper Room* for their private daily meditation and also to provide a discussion topic for this little Wednesday meeting. The spirit and philosophy of this meditational guide had almost as big an influence as the Oxford Group on early A.A. One can see this especially in the Big Book, where the ideas taught in *The Upper Room* shaped many of the most basic theological principles and assumptions. As far as is known, no one who played a shaping role in early Indiana A.A. was connected in any strong way with the Oxford Group or used any of their literature for A.A. meetings anywhere in the state. So the Oxford Group influence lay in the deep background in numerous ways, including the basic ideas behind many of the twelve steps, but was not an actual presence in Indiana A.A., even at its beginning.

The Methodist Episcopal Church South had begun publishing *The Upper Room* in the Spring of 1935 in Nashville, Tennessee, about the same time A.A. itself was founded. When the Ninth National Archives Workshop was held at a location near there last year, Don F., the Florida A.A. archivist, took a group of us A.A. archivists and historians to visit the headquarters of *The Upper Room*. It was an extraordinary experience: every single one of us was filled with a spirit of incredible awe when we walked into the chapel which was part of the building. The interior of this chapel was done all in white, in the style of antebellum Southern mansions with Greek columns in front, and was otherwise adorned only with a huge bas relief of Christ and the twelve apostles at the Last Supper, on the wall behind the altar. Every single person in the group seemed to be equally struck by the enormous feeling of holiness in that simple room, and by the awareness that this was in some way our sacred A.A. heritage too. We somehow knew that, as A.A. members, this was part of our ancestral homeland, and we seemed to intuitively “recognize” what we were seeing and feeling, in the same way that we remembered knowing instantly at the feeling level, from the moment we entered Dr. Bob’s house on our first visit there, that we had entered one of our A.A. sacred places.

*The Upper Room* was a prayer book filled with a simple, deep, and heartfelt piety. It was however also strongly influenced by the Protestant liberals of the early twentieth century, who drew inspiration from works like Adolf Harnack’s *What Is Christianity?* (1900) and Horace Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture* (1847). Bushnell argued in that book that although some Christians might be brought to faith by a sudden conversion experience of great emotional intensity (of the sort which were seen so often in the American frontier revivals of the early nineteenth century), that most Christians

would gain spiritual awakening through a process which was more of the educational variety.

The *Upper Room* was designed to provide that “educational experience.” Each page had one day’s meditation. There were bible verses and readings, and a meditation for that day, and a prayer. Most important of all, however, *The Upper Room* was shaped by the fundamental Wesleyan and Methodist belief that real spirituality was not a matter of outward, formal religion but “the religion of the heart.”<sup>60</sup> So *The Upper Room* was written in a way which could cross the normal denominational boundaries, and it talked about spirituality in a way which any sincere and tolerant person could appreciate, no matter what his or her religious background. It continued to be the work used for daily meditations by most A.A.’s in the United States down to 1948.

### **The first two A.A. groups in Indiana**

J. D. made numerous twelfth step calls after he moved to Evansville, but was at first unable to get any other Hoosier alcoholic to join him. Things improved when Dr. Bob sent him a copy of the newly published Big Book right after it came off the press, and armed with this new tool, J. D. had a good deal more to work with than just his own claims about what their little group had accomplished in Akron. The first A.A. meeting in Indiana was held by him and a local surgeon, Dr. Joe Weldorn, after Dr. Joe’s drinking finally landed him in the county jail in April or May of 1940, and he finally became willing — sitting there in his cell staring at the bars — to do something about his problem.

Once that first little group had been established, A.A. began spreading quickly through the rest of Indiana. On October 28, just a few months later, an A.A. group was started in Indianapolis, after

Doherty Sheerin, a retired businessman there, traveled down to visit J. D.'s group and see how it was run. Dohr in Indianapolis and J. D. in Evansville began working together as a team, and eventually established A.A. groups over much of the rest of the state.

Dohr was a good Irish Catholic, and on November 10, 1943, he brought a young priest named Father Ralph Pfau into the A.A. program. Father Ralph was not only the first Roman Catholic priest to get sober in A.A., he also became one of the four most published A.A. authors when he began writing his famous Golden Books, published under the pseudonym of Father John Doe.

As we have seen in these two volumes, the only large part of Indiana which did not initially receive A.A. from that Indianapolis-Evansville axis was the St. Joseph river valley region in the north, where A.A. got established when Ken Merrill (a factory owner) and Joseph Soulard "Soo" Cates (an engineer who worked as a sales representative for a large national corporation) started a meeting in South Bend on February 22, 1943, using just the Big Book for their guide. They do not seem to have had any contact during the first year or two with the Indiana A.A. groups further south.

## **Fulton J. Sheen**

Although *The Upper Room* was the most common work that A.A.'s used for their daily prayers during that very early period, this was not the sole source of material used for meeting topics and group meditations in the St. Joseph river valley region. Marty Gallagher in Elkhart, whose memory went back further than any other old-timer in the area, said that other things were used too, and that some A.A. meetings, for example, would be set so that everyone could sit and listen to Fulton J. Sheen speak over national radio on

the Catholic Hour. They would then use his talk to provide the discussion topic.

Sheen, a Roman Catholic priest and theologian who taught at Catholic University, first went on the radio program in 1928. By the time A.A. came along, Father Sheen had over a million loyal listeners tuning in to hear him every week. He was eventually made a bishop in 1951. His style of preaching was attractive to A.A. people: Bill W. received instructions in Catholicism from him at one point, when Bill was flirting with converting to that faith.<sup>61</sup>

It would be wrong to speak of Sheen as a liberal, but he knew how to speak about spiritual matters in a way which non-Catholics could also appreciate and understand. So his radio talks were useful for the same reason that the *Upper Room* was useful: it was a way of talking about spirituality which crossed many of the normal Christian denominational boundaries.

## **The Move Away from Exclusively Christian Language**

Many A.A. people however eventually began to be uncomfortable with the use of meditational literature which was so exclusively Christian, even if it was a very liberal or non-denominational version of Christianity. Already in the Big Book, the name of Christ was only mentioned once, on page eleven, where he was referred to merely as “a great man” who had an excellent moral teaching which was nevertheless not always wholly practical.

In the United States, going back at least as far as the New England Transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), there were many who believed that a serious pursuit of spirituality required going to all the great spiritual classics for inspiration and help. The Bible was one

great spiritual classic, but there were many other equally ancient and inspired spiritual classics found around the world: the writings of Confucius, various Hindu religious works, and so on.

And behind the Transcendentalists lay the great thinkers of the eighteenth century Enlightenment — people like Voltaire, Kant, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson — who believed that good spirituality had to reject the world of authoritarian religious doctrines and dogmas and infallible holy books, and speak in terms which would be intelligible to rational human beings anywhere in the world. A.A. from the beginning was deeply affected by the spirit of the Enlightenment and its morality of knowledge: it was fundamentally dishonest, the great teachers of the Enlightenment believed, to ask intelligent people to take things on blind faith — as dishonest as lying or stealing or trying to pass bad checks. Real knowledge always had to be based on either (1) a rational explanation based on good empirical evidence or (2) immediate personal experience. This fundamental rule went back to John Locke, who in 1690 published *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, a book which defined what has been regarded as “the common sense view of the universe” from his time all the way down to the present.

Also, up until almost the middle of the twentieth century, most Americans and Europeans who had any kind of education past the simple grammar school variety were taught Latin, and the brighter ones learned Greek as well. So all educated westerners were also influenced by the spiritual teachings of the ancient pagan Greeks and Romans, and particularly by the philosophical ideas of Plato and the Stoics. Many early A.A. people were professionals, who had learned at least a little about the classics as part of their college educations, and they sometimes found some sort of Platonic or Stoic concept of God more congenial than what they were hearing in the Christian

churches: the higher power was the divine unity of all things (in which our spirits too were participants), or the creative divine Mind or Reason of which this material universe was an expression.

## **Twenty-Four Hours a Day**

In May 1942, a once wealthy Boston businessman named Richmond Walker who had lost everything due to his drinking, went to his first A.A. meeting and never had another drink again in his life. The little Boston A.A. group which he joined had barely gotten started, and had just split off from the Jacoby Club, to which it had been closely attached at the beginning.<sup>62</sup> Rich also had a home in Daytona Beach, Florida, where he was also actively involved in the A.A. movement. He began writing some meditations for himself on little cards, which he would carry around with him, and finally in 1948, the Florida A.A. people persuaded him to print these up in book form. He printed some copies, under the sponsorship of the Daytona Beach A.A. group, and began distributing them from his basement. He gave it the title *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*.

Rich had been educated at a private school and then at Williams College, an old East Coast men's college (founded in 1785), located in Williamstown, Massachusetts, just a few miles from the Vermont border. He was an honors student who won a gold medal in classical Greek, and not only knew a good deal about the New England Transcendentalists and nineteenth century German idealism, but also had a thorough knowledge of the philosophy of both Plato and Kant. His meditational book started with a quotation from a Hindu author and made no reference to Christ or to any specific Christian doctrines. His idea, as he said in his Foreword, was to produce a book which expressed "universal spiritual thoughts" and carefully avoided using too much language which was too closely tied to any

particular one of the world's religions. It was a book designed to be read and appreciated by intelligent people from any part of the globe.

The book was first printed just for the program people in Florida, but A.A. members from all over the country quickly began requesting copies. Jimmy Miller, who came into the program in South Bend in 1948, could not remember ever using any other meditational book. Publication figures show that there were soon probably more A.A. people in the United States as a whole who owned their own personal copy of the *Twenty-Four Hour Book* than there were people who owned a *Big Book*. At least half the A.A.'s in the country had their own copy of the little meditational book.

In A.A. prayers and devotions, *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* totally replaced *The Upper Room* which, as we have noted, had been published by the evangelical movement in its Southern Methodist variety. But lying behind many of the small print passages in *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* was another evangelical work, *God Calling* by Two Listeners. So there was always some strong evangelical influence on early A.A. thought, whether it came from the Oxford Group in the very beginning, from the Southern Methodists later on, or from *God Calling* after 1948.<sup>63</sup>

### **The two basic A.A. books**

All the old-timers in the St. Joseph river valley who came in after 1948 report that they got sober on two books: the *Big Book* and the *Twenty-Four Hour Book*. The first book gave them the steps, but this also of course included the eleventh step: "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." It told us to pray, but did not tell us how.

The Twenty-Four Hour book told us how. It showed in its little daily readings how to do all three things mentioned in the eleventh step: improve our conscious contact, obtain guidance as to God's will for us, and draw upon the power of the divine grace. Many early A.A.'s in the St. Joseph river valley carried the little black book around with them everywhere they went. Partly this was because it was so much smaller than the Big Book editions of those days, and could be slipped into a pocket or a small purse. But probably the most important reason was because when mental upsets occurred — resentment, anxiety, fear, despair — and they felt their spirits beginning to fall to pieces, the little black book contained the kind of message which could, as a kind of instant spiritual first aid, often calm the troubled soul better even than reading in the Big Book. They read from both the Big Book and the Twenty-Four Hour Book in their meetings, and regularly used the Twenty-Four Hour book to provide topics for discussion meetings.

### **The Little Red Book**

The Little Red Book (originally titled *An Interpretation of the Twelve Steps of the Alcoholics Anonymous Program*, first published in 1946) was also read from and used for topics in A.A. meetings in parts of the United States and Canada. It was written by A.A. member Ed Webster in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and sponsored by the Nicollet Group there. Dr. Bob helped Ed Webster write it and strongly supported it: we can learn a lot about Dr. Bob's strategies for working with beginners by studying this book. It was one of the four most read books in early A.A. It was not used for A.A. meetings in the St. Joseph river valley, but one old timer told me that there were strong supporters of this book in other parts of Indiana,

such as in some of the A.A. groups in Fort Wayne, for example, and in Indianapolis.

Like the Twenty-Four Hour book, it does not talk of prayer to Christ or obtaining salvation through Christ, but speaks always of praying directly to God or “the Power Greater than Ourselves.” The A.A. program was never in any way hostile to Christianity (or to any other of the great religions of the world), but it was nevertheless a firmly held belief that A.A. books and A.A. meetings had always to use language which everyone could use, not just devoted Christians.

### **The Detroit or Washington D.C. Pamphlet**

There was a little pamphlet, laying out a set of four beginners lessons for newcomers to A.A., which was also very important in many parts of the country. Its actual title was “Alcoholics Anonymous: An Interpretation of the Twelve Steps.” Our best information at present is that it was put together in its commonly used form in Detroit by the North-West Group at 10216 Plymouth Road, which began conducting Beginners Meetings for newcomers on June 14, 1943, so it is often referred to in the midwest as the Detroit Pamphlet. What seems to be one of the earliest printed versions of it clearly came out of Detroit. The first of the printed versions however was sponsored by the A.A. group in Washington, D.C., perhaps in late 1943 or the first half of 1944, so on the east coast it is often referred to as the Washington D.C. Pamphlet. This pamphlet was also later reprinted under the sponsorship of various local A.A. groups in Oklahoma, in Seattle over on the West Coast, and so on.

At first glance, the pamphlet seems very poorly and awkwardly written, so that it is easy to discount it too quickly as a serious tool

for teaching beginners in A.A. In the 1990's, however, some of the old-timers in both South Bend and Elkhart, as an experiment, used the Detroit Pamphlet for working with newcomers in A.A. meetings, and had a good deal of success. They regarded it as the best, clearest, and most effective set of A.A. beginners lessons they had ever seen in actual practice. These new people's eyes were opened, their minds were pointed in all the right directions, and insights just kept on leaping out of their mouths in the discussions afterwards.

### **The South Bend Beginners Classes**

Early South Bend A.A. gave beginners lessons, but unfortunately no notes or handouts have survived. According to Nick's List, it started out as a set of three classes, then went briefly to four classes, but ended up as a set of five classes, where Ken Merrill did the fifth class. According to Ellen Lantz however, it was a three class series in the mid 1950's (perhaps a reversion to the original three-class scheme), each one lasting two or three hours, and Ken was now teaching all three classes. However it was done at various times, the early South Bend beginners lessons do not seem to have been simply duplicates of the four-class format used in the Detroit Pamphlet. They were also clearly structured differently from the four-class format seen in the Instructor's Outline which Ed Webster typed up for the A.A. beginners' classes he began teaching in May 1942 at 2218 First Avenue South in Minneapolis (the classes which later evolved into *The Little Red Book*).

When Ken Merrill taught all of the beginners' lessons himself as a set of three classes, there is evidence suggesting that he used the first class to talk about the first step and also the inventory and amends steps, and that he did not introduce the topic of finding a higher power until the second class. This was a very interesting and

unique strategy, totally different from either the Detroit or Minneapolis sequence, but it worked well, and drew people from great distances away.

In fact, A.A. in the whole St. Joseph river valley region operated on the basic assumption that one truly came to know God only *after* becoming involved in working the steps. People began the program knowing little or nothing about who God really was. As Ed Pike put it (see Chapter 13 of this volume), “I noticed that, in the second step, ‘we *came* to believe,’ and that gave me some encouragement too, because it doesn’t say that we believed in God and therefore we got sober. It says ‘we *came* to believe.’” Unlike most major religious movements, the chapter in the Big Book on “How It Works” does not require faith or belief or a conversion experience in order to begin walking the true spiritual path, but simply *honesty*. That is quite extraordinary. It is an extreme radicalization of St. Augustine’s basic principle that God is Truth Itself, but it can be defended on the pragmatic grounds that this is the way things actually work in real practice.

## **The A.A. Tools of Recovery**

In the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, A.A. all over the St. Joseph river valley experienced a period of rapid growth, producing a huge influx of raw beginners, along with the creation of many additional meetings. Three of the old-timers got together — Bill Peters, Don Helvey, and Marcel “Ben” Benson — along with two other men who were relatively new to the program — Chainsaw Clint Becker and Jan N. — and put together a short piece called the A.A. Tools of Recovery, summarizing the seven most important things which they felt that these newcomers to the program needed to know. Benson was a Frenchman and Clint got his nickname from an incident that

happened back when he was still drinking. He was working as a tree trimmer at that time, his wife got mad at him and locked him out of the house, and he cut the door out with a chainsaw.

The Tools of Recovery are still to this day read at the beginning of many A.A. meetings in Elkhart, Mishawaka, South Bend, and other parts of the St. Joseph river valley region along with reading the twelve steps:

**ABSTINENCE:** We commit ourselves to stay away from the *first* drink, one day at a time.

**MEETINGS:** We attend A.A. meetings to learn how the program works, to share our experience, strength and hope with each other, and because through the support of the fellowship, we *can* do what we could never do alone.

**SPONSOR:** A sponsor is a person in the A.A. program who has what we want and is continually sober. A sponsor is someone you can relate to, have access to and can confide in.

**TELEPHONE:** The telephone is our lifeline — our meetings between meetings. Call *before* you take the first drink. The more numbers you have, the more insurance you have.

**LITERATURE:** The *Big Book* of Alcoholics Anonymous is our basic tool and text. The *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and A.A. pamphlets are recommended reading, and are available at this meeting.

**SERVICE:** Service helps our personal program grow. Service is giving in A.A. Service is leading a meeting, making coffee, moving chairs, being a sponsor, or emptying

ashtrays. Service is action, and action is the magic word in this program.

**ANONYMITY:** Whom you see here, what you hear here, when you leave here, let it stay here. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our program.

Many of the good old-timers, like Submarine Bill and Raymond I., believed that it was important to repeat these basic principles over and over, until newcomers had them instinctively drilled into their heads, and could repeat them almost like a litany. The first principle made it clear that the way an alcoholic kept from getting drunk was not to take even the first drink. The next five were the things that not only got people sober but kept them sober. Good sponsors like Bill and Raymond noted that those who relapsed and returned to drinking had almost invariably failed to do one or more of these five things in any serious and dedicated way. And the seventh principle was a constant reminder that A.A. meetings could not function properly unless members could talk about all of their feelings and anything that was bothering them, in an accepting and shame-free atmosphere, without worrying about whether it was going to be repeated outside of the group. That was a solemn pledge which the members of the group had to make to one another.

For A.A. in the St. Joseph river valley, the Twelve Steps and the Seven Tools of Recovery were the basic foundation stones upon which everything else was built. If you removed these solid supports, everything else would come crashing down.

## **The Grapevine and Bar-less**

In the 1950's, according to Ellen Lantz's reminiscences, they always read from something at the Elkhart closed discussion

meetings, and frequently used this reading to provide the discussion topic. She said that it had become very common during this period to use an article from the *Grapevine*, the magazine which was published by the New York A.A. office (it first began coming out in 1944, under the editorial guidance of Marty Mann and some of her friends).<sup>64</sup> But Ellen said that they would also sometimes use an article from *Bar-less*, the little magazine which was published by the A.A. prison group. Some of these articles were written by people who were not prisoners. Ken Merrill, for example, the founder of A.A. in South Bend, wrote a very good article for the magazine once, about the way alcoholics get locked into behavior patterns during their childhood years, and because of a traumatic event or a general dysfunctional family situation, are unable to grow past that stage, and continue to throw two-year-old temper tantrums, or become lost in ten-year-old daydreaming fantasies of romance and heroism, or whatever, even after they are adults.

## The First Principle

When I asked Brooklyn Bob, one of the South Bend old-timers, whether there were any rules in good old-time A.A. about what books A.A. people could and could not read, he just laughed and snorted, and said, **“We read anything we could get our hands on that might get us sober!”** Good old-time A.A. was a totally pragmatic program. It was not an authoritarian system of doctrines and dogmas and endless rules, which had to be followed blindly, and were imposed upon the membership by self-important people who thought they had the right to boss other people around (“for their own good” has always been the lame alibi used by this kind of arrogant person).

In early A.A., people simply experimented and tried various things, and if they worked, they recommended them to other members. As is always the case in A.A., the recommendations of people who had a good deal of time in the program were taken more seriously. Pragmatically, if they had that many years of sobriety, they must have been doing something right! So on matters of what sorts of books and writings should be read in meetings and made available for loan or purchase by groups and intergroup offices, people looked to the wisdom and experience of those who had time in the program and quality sobriety.

The Central Service Offices in South Bend and in Elkhart both still follow that principle. They have a variety of books on spirituality, recovery, and A.A. history available for loan or purchase — books printed by various publishing houses and usually (but not always necessarily) authored by A.A. members. There are Al-Anon books as well. But the selection of books which are provided is made on the recommendation of responsible people who have a good deal of quality time in the program.

They do not have the sort of pop recovery books that can lead newcomers seriously astray or involve them in psychologically dangerous schemes (like one notorious book encouraging people to “get in contact with their inner child” in a way which actually produced in some cases total psychotic breakdowns requiring long hospitalization in mental facilities). But the South Bend office has carried some materials which were purely psychological, such as offprints (distributed by the National Council on Alcoholism) of scholarly papers written by Dr. Harry M. Tiebout for psychiatric journals and journals on alcoholism studies. Tiebout was not an alcoholic, but he was one of the most important of the handful of psychiatrists in the early days who appreciated and understood and backed the new Alcoholics Anonymous movement, and his

statements about how A.A. works are still extremely insightful today.

The commercial bookstore chains do not have good material for A.A. people on their shelves, and the small commercial operations which sell “recovery materials” such as t-shirts and coffee mugs cannot be totally depended upon to have quality literature for sale either. If groups and intergroups do not make good books available for A.A. members, no outside commercial venture is going to take over that responsibility. Learning that we have to be responsible for ourselves, instead of just depending on others and demanding “to be taken care of,” is a vital part of recovery from alcoholism.

## The Second Principle

The first principle was that A.A. groups and intergroups, as well as individual members, have to make their own responsible decisions about which books and writings are going to be helpful for recovering alcoholics. However, there was a generally assumed principle that seems to have been followed, not only in the St. Joseph river valley, but in early A.A. all across the United States and Canada: **It was usually assumed that any piece that was authored or sponsored by one A.A. group could automatically be used to read from in meetings by any other A.A. group which chose to do so.**

That was also a guiding principle followed at New York A.A. headquarters. On November 11, 1944, for example, Bobby Burger, the secretary at the Alcoholic Foundation in New York (what is today called the General Service Office) wrote a letter to Barry Collins, who had helped Ed Webster publish the Little Red Book:<sup>65</sup>

Dear Barry,

. . . The Washington D.C. pamphlet [a.k.a. the Detroit Pamphlet] and the new Cleveland “Sponsorship” pamphlet and a host of others are all local projects, as is Nicollette’s “An Interpretation of the Twelve Steps” [the ancestor of *The Little Red Book*]. We do not actually approve or disapprove of these local pieces; by that I mean that the Foundation feels that each Group is entitled to write up its own “can opener” and let it stand on its merits. All of them have good points and very few have caused any controversy. But as in all things of a local nature, we keep hands off, either pro or con. I think there must be at least 25 local pamphlets now being used and I’ve yet to see one that hasn’t some good points. I think it is up to each individual Group whether it wants to use and buy these pamphlets from the Group that puts them out.

Sincerely, Bobby

(Margaret R. Burger)

Bill Wilson felt the same way. In November 1950, he wrote a note to Barry Collins about *The Little Red Book* making the same basic point, only even more strongly. Such locally sponsored works “fill a definite need” and their “usefulness is unquestioned.” Most importantly of all, Bill went on to say in that letter: **“Here at the Foundation we are not policemen; we’re a service and AAs are free to read any book they choose.”**<sup>66</sup>

In other words, based on the principle of group autonomy, an A.A. group can in fact choose to read anything at its meetings which it wants to, if a group conscience has been held. Even if there are other A.A. groups which are convinced that they are wrong, a long-standing principle in the New York A.A. office, repeated over and over, is “the right of a group to be wrong.” This is an extremely important principle which has even further ramifications: even if 51% of the A.A. groups in a particular area are convinced that the

other 49% are wrong, they cannot force them to read what they want that minority group to read. Too many A.A. people came out of religious traditions where the leadership tried to stuff things down their throats in this fashion: “you will read only what we order you to read.” They rebelled against it then, and they will not ultimately tolerate A.A. organizations either, if they start trying to operate like the worst kind of repressive religious cult.

An individual A.A. group can read anything the members want to in its meetings. But as the Second Principle makes clear, it is especially the case, that if the book or pamphlet or reading *was originally sponsored by some other A.A. group*, any other A.A. groups in the country can borrow and use that piece without having to go into any long debate about its appropriateness. So the Twenty-Four Hour book, *The Little Red Book*, the Detroit-Washington D.C. Pamphlet, the Tools of Recovery, and *Bar-less* (the little magazine produced by the prison A.A. group) are simply automatically considered as appropriate for reading at meetings if a particular group chooses to do so.

## **PART TWO. THE RICH VARIETY OF OLD-TIME A.A. PRACTICES**

### **The Christian tradition: limited uses after 1948**

*The Upper Room* and Fulton J. Sheen's talks and other heavily Christian-oriented materials (such as *God Calling* by Two Listeners, the prayers of the Rosary, and so on) have continued to be employed by numerous A.A. people in the St. Joseph river valley for their own personal use. In fact nearly all of the most deeply spiritual members regularly use traditional religious materials in their private devotions and in their studies of spiritual issues. But things which were too obviously totally Christian, particularly if they spoke of salvation as only being possible through accepting Jesus Christ as one's Lord and Savior, stopped being used in meetings on the simple pragmatic grounds that it drove an excessive number of newcomers away, did not in fact prove to be necessary for getting people sober and leading them into the paths of true serenity and the greatest depths of love, and seemed to ultimately involve the group in too much pointless debate and endless hostile disputing over narrow Christian theological issues that did not help anyone get sober.

The last time someone tried to set up an A.A. meeting in the St. Joseph river valley on an explicitly Christian basis, with Bible readings and scripture verses studied at the meeting, was around ten years ago, and the group did not even last a year. This was in spite of the fact that Indiana is often regarded as part of the American "Bible Belt." Everyone except the old-timer who started it finally

quit or went out and got drunk. That is why we Hoosiers up in the northern part of the state are skeptical about trying to run A.A. meetings that way today. But everybody agreed that the good old-timer who tried this experiment had a perfect right to do so. There may be other places in America or elsewhere where it would work. It certainly did not violate any A.A. “rule,” and if it had actually worked, we would now have additional meetings in northern Indiana, I am sure, organized in this way. A.A. is pragmatic, not doctrinaire.

The Serenity Prayer, the Lord’s Prayer, and the St. Francis Prayer are however still heavily used in the St. Joseph river valley, even though they were all three originally Christian prayers, because it is felt that they set out universal spiritual truths that any recovering alcoholic is in need of. The Serenity Prayer, we remember, was written by Reinhold Niebuhr, who was professor of Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, and was one of the best Christian theologians in the English-speaking world at that time. A few A.A. people today do not like the use of the Lord’s Prayer at the close of meetings (an almost universal practice in the St. Joseph river valley), in spite of the fact that it contains no explicitly Christian teachings in the narrow sense (no references to the Trinity, the saving work of Christ, or anything else like that), any more than the other two prayers do. Some suspect that part of the discomfort which some feel over the use of that prayer (the only one of the three which they single out to attack) arises from the line in it which says “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” It may be a very hard and uncomfortable teaching indeed, to be reminded constantly of this universal spiritual truth, but if we refuse to forgive, resentment will continue to fester in our hearts, and we will eventually end up going back out and drinking again. All the great spiritual traditions of the world —

Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Native American religion, and so on — make clear that *forgiveness* and *compassion* and *mercy* and the restoration of *harmony* (different religions use different technical terms here) are necessary to living a good spiritual life.

## The Golden Books

Ralph Pfau, who wrote under the pen name of Father John Doe, was one of the four most published A.A. authors. He was a Roman Catholic priest who got sober in Indianapolis on November 10, 1943. He conducted a weekend spiritual retreat for A.A. members on June 6–8, 1947 at St. Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Indiana. Eleven people from the South Bend A.A. group attended the retreat, a very large contingent: Harry Stevens (who sponsored the A.A. prison group at the Indiana state penitentiary), Johnnie Morgan the barber, Ray G., Jack [Q?], Jim McNeil (who was extremely active in all sorts of A.A. service work), Art O. [A?I?], Russ S., Fred Clements, Joe R., Ed Young the newspaperman, and Les Beatty the electrician. Father Ralph gave everyone who attended, as a souvenir of the retreat, a 56-page pamphlet with a shiny gold foil cover, called *The Spiritual Side*, where he talked about how all of the twelve steps (except for perhaps the first step) were essentially spiritual in their nature.

People who had not been at the retreat began asking for copies, Father Ralph had to do another printing, and over the years that followed, produced thirteen other pamphlets of this sort on different spiritual topics. They came to be called the Golden Books because of the gold foil covered cardboard covers which most of them had. He traveled all over the United States and Canada, giving talks and conducting weekend spiritual retreats, all the way down to his death

on February 19, 1967, which caught him on the road in Owensboro, Kentucky.<sup>67</sup>

One good old-timer, Larry W., told me that, in his early days in the program, those A.A. people in Michigan and Indiana whose serenity and sobriety most impressed him were invariably great fans of Father Ralph's books.

### Specialized meetings

In the St. Joseph river valley, Father Ralph was certainly the third most read A.A. author. But a different kind of procedure was followed with his writings. Those members who were deeply interested in the spiritual life would form small private meetings in their homes to read and study the most recent Golden Book. Copies of these pamphlets were (and still are) sold at the Central Service Office in South Bend. Good old-timers like Submarine Bill would give copies to the people whom they sponsored, and tell them to read them carefully. But there was a kind of tacit understanding that it was not usually appropriate to read from one of the Golden Books or use it for meeting topics in official A.A. group meetings.

Part of this arose from the fact that Father Ralph's books *were not officially sponsored by the Indianapolis A.A. group*. He wrote and published those totally on his own. Writings which were not sponsored by a regular A.A. group or intergroup were not automatically regarded as necessarily wise for other groups to use for official A.A. meetings. The Golden Books also were *not for everyone in the program* (some people liked them and others did not), and perhaps even more importantly, they dealt with fairly advanced issues in the spiritual life which *would have probably been greatly confusing to a lot of newcomers who had just walked into their first A.A. meeting*.

We are talking here about the question of what sorts of things were appropriate to read in officially scheduled A.A. meetings, that is, those which were listed in the meeting directory for that town or county. These were meetings where one expected struggling alcoholics to stagger through the door, just having chosen a meeting at random off the list, seeking blindly for help, and too new and befuddled to understand anything except the most basic A.A. material.

But there was in fact a whole tradition of specialized meetings which were not A.A. meetings in the formal sense — particularly in the sense that they were not listed in the local meeting directories that were handed out to those who were brand new to the program. Private study groups meeting in people's homes were one sort of specialized meeting. For a long time, Submarine Bill had all the people whom he sponsored meet once a year to study the twelve steps, sometimes using a tape recording of Father Ralph's talk on the steps or something else of that sort to start off each session.

A private study group of this sort could read any sort of book which the participants wanted to, and groups sometimes chose very interesting sorts of materials to read and study. The general understanding, for example, was that A.A. people needed to be familiar with all sorts of different kinds of spiritual works, from various religious traditions, and other things that were important to the understanding of A.A. history. I have heard of groups on the West Coast, for example, meeting to study the medieval spiritual writer Meister Eckhart, or my own book on *The Higher Power of the Twelve-Step Program*.

In the St. Joseph river valley region, Father David G. Suelzer, O.S.C., Prior of the Crozier Fathers and Brothers at Wawasee, Indiana, conducted weekend spiritual retreats for A.A. members. He was not an alcoholic himself, but he was a consultant at Hazelden

during the 1960's and was very much a friend of the A.A. movement. **There never were any rules saying that non-A.A. members could not speak to A.A. groups.** Over the last ten or fifteen years, I have heard people try to claim that this was an ancient and sacrosanct A.A. rule, but that is just silly and historically ignorant. A *closed A.A. discussion meeting* is not supposed to have anyone present who does not have a desire to stop drinking (unless the group conscience decides otherwise), but this is not the same as an A.A. convention, conference, workshop, or international, which is an open meeting.

Or, to mention a different kind of specialized meeting, a group of A.A. people might set up their own private weekend spiritual retreat. For the people in the St. Joe river valley region there were for a long time well-attended annual retreats of that sort at Fatima House retreat center at Notre Dame University and at the Yokefellow retreat center in Defiance, Ohio. In the 1990's, meetings began being set up, bringing people together from various parts of Indiana — and also large meetings at the national level where people came from all over the United States and Canada — to hear talks about A.A. archives and A.A. history. These were not necessarily sponsored by any particular A.A. group, intergroup, or Area organization, but were the ad hoc creation of a group of interested A.A. members.

There were also workshops set up by the Elkhart intergroup at mini-conferences, where the A.A. people who attended could hear psychotherapists talk about specific psychological problems which recovering people often had to deal with, and where A.A. members could attend Al-Anon workshops and vice versa, and where all sorts of other topics could be discussed, on A.A. history and other subjects.

In other words, real old-time A.A. was always pragmatic and flexible. About the only real rule which was followed, was that it

was usually considered inappropriate to take an official weekly A.A. meeting which was listed in the official meeting schedule, and use any kinds of readings or topics except those which would be of general benefit to everyone in the program, including especially newcomers who had just walked in the door. On the other hand, the more specialized meetings which were intended for people who were beyond the newcomer stage, were often listed in monthly intergroup newsletters and on flyers which were distributed to all the groups in that city or county.

## **Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age**

There are well-meaning people today who sometimes mistakenly think that the issue was whether or not a particular book or pamphlet was “conference approved.” We remember that when Brooklyn Bob was asked about this, he simply snorted and laughed and said, **“We read anything we could get our hands on that might get us sober!”** When one says that a particular publication is “conference approved,” all one really means is that a group of delegates meeting in New York decided to spend New York headquarters money on publishing it. New York never ever had enough funds to print everything that could be useful to alcoholics trying to get sober and stay sober. The principle of institutional poverty means that A.A. as such cannot set up a publishing house of the sort which one sees among various American religious denominations: the Methodists’ Abingdon Press, the Lutherans’ Fortress Press and Augsburg Press, and other such publishing houses which require a large investment in buildings and printing presses and large staffs of editors and so on, which are financially supported by denominational funds.

With enormous difficulty, the New York A.A. office finally assembled enough money to print the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* in 1953. A number of A.A. meetings were subsequently created in the St. Joseph river valley called “step meetings,” which would read through the part of the book dealing with one of the twelve steps every week, and then discuss that step as a group. Sometimes the traditions were also studied in the same fashion by the group.

(It should also however be said that there are some good old-timers in Indiana who still believe that *The Little Red Book* — which was Dr. Bob’s baby — and the Detroit or Washington D.C. Pamphlet are actually better introductions to the steps for newcomers. They believe that the material on the steps in the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* is too philosophical and complicated for newcomers, and that it just confuses alcoholics when they first come in.)

The old-timers in the St. Joseph river valley say that there was enormous excitement when *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* appeared in 1957. As one old-timer put it, a woman who remembers those days clearly, “it was the first chance we got to learn something about our history.” But the interesting thing is, that although this book was approved by the delegates in New York and published by Alcoholics Anonymous World Services in New York, the A.A. people in South Bend met in small private groups in people’s homes to read and study this work.

### **The Third Principle**

In other words, in early A.A. in the St. Joseph river valley, A.A. meetings which were listed on the official meeting schedule would often read and study books which were not published by the central

New York A.A. office, and on the other hand, they believed that some of the books which were published in New York and “conference approved,” were nevertheless not appropriate for general A.A. meetings. What this meant was that **the question of whether a particular book or writing was or was not “conference approved” meant nothing in and of itself about whether it might or might not be judged as appropriate for reading at A.A. meetings.**

**Books by non-A.A. authors:**  
**Emmet Fox’s *Sermon on the Mount***

Going back to the very beginning of A.A. in the St. Joseph river valley, there were important books written by non-A.A. authors which good sponsors recommended to the people whom they sponsored, which were made available for loan or purchase by A.A. groups and intergroup offices, and which could be studied at private unofficial meetings in people’s homes or at spiritual retreats.

Ellen Lantz in Elkhart told a story which was similar to that of many other early A.A. members in the St. Joseph river valley. A book written by a non-A.A. author played a crucial role in enabling her to get sober and stay sober. In fact in her case, after she first came into the program, she had to go through three and a half years where she was having periodic relapses before she finally gained permanent sobriety in March of 1951. From the beginning apparently, she was reading *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* every morning (which she continued to do all the way down to her death in 1985). But then Ed Pike’s wife Bobby started meeting with her regularly to read in Father Ralph’s Golden Books, and then, in particular, they made a very thorough study of Emmet Fox’s *Sermon*

*on the Mount*. This helped Ellen finally turn the corner, and stop the continual relapsing.

Old-timer Gil L. says that the Riley group in South Bend, of which he was a member, was a very effective group which was using Fox's *Sermon on the Mount* as the central focus of their meetings all the way down into the 1970's. (This also illustrates the point that individual A.A. groups can read anything they want to in their meetings if they hold a group conscience and decide to do so.) Grouchy John and many other South Bend good old-timers were recommending this book to newcomers all the way down to the 1990's, and it is still to this day prominently offered for sale at both the South Bend and Elkhart Central Service offices. Moreover, none of the real old-timers would ever have suggested that reading that book could do anyone harm.

Emmet Fox was not an alcoholic. He was a Protestant pastor who was a major leader in what was called New Thought, a form of Christian spirituality which stressed the ways in which the thoughts which run through our minds shape our lives and can even affect our physical health and the material world around us, for good or ill. A.A. people found his writings uniquely effective in helping alcoholics learn basic spiritual principles, and free themselves from authoritarian and dogmatic forms of traditional religious teaching.

Another book by a non-A.A. member which the old timers in this part of the midwest frequently mention is Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking*, which came out in 1952. Peale came from a Methodist background, and combined New Thought principles with a very sophisticated knowledge of psychiatry and psychotherapy. He also believed that A.A. was the most important spiritual movement of the twentieth century, and was very impressed by the A.A. program.

## The Akron List

In the A.A. program, Fox's book was the most widely known and recommended book written by a non-A.A. author, but there were also other important works. The Akron Manual, a pamphlet that was written and published in Akron in 1940 or thereabouts, and that was intended to be handed out to newcomers when they were admitted for detoxing at St. Thomas Hospital in Sister Ignatia's alcoholic ward, gave a list of ten works in all, which were recommended reading for beginners. At the top of the list came the Big Book of course, and then the Bible, with specific mention of certain key portions. In the New Testament, it was recommended that alcoholics going through detoxification read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), 1 Corinthians 13, and the letter of James. Then in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament), the pamphlet advised reading and re-reading the 23rd Psalm and the 91st Psalm (both of which are very good for people who are scared to death and coming to pieces). The other eight works were all by non-A.A. authors:

Henry Drummond, *The Greatest Thing in the World*.

*The Unchanging Friend*, a series published by the Bruce Publishing Co. in Milwaukee.

James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh*.

Emmet Fox, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

Winfred Rhoades, *The Self You Have to Live With*.

Ernest M. Ligon, *Psychology of Christian Personality*.

E. Stanley Jones, *Abundant Living*.

Bruce Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*.

Mel B. from Toledo has just come out with a reprint of two of these books, the ones by James Allen and Henry Drummond.<sup>68</sup> Mel says that when he first came into the program back in 1950, these

two works were made available for purchase by A.A. groups all over the country, and that when he started reading and studying them, they helped save his life.

Again, early A.A. was flexible and pragmatic. Many of the good old-timers found that these particular books were extremely useful and helpful, and so they recommended them to beginners, and they went to the effort to make sure that newcomers could purchase them at their A.A. groups if they desired.

### **Encouraging A.A. Members to Read**

The Detroit/Washington D.C. Pamphlet stated at the beginning of each lesson that studying their class material was not intended to eliminate the need for such things as “the careful reading and re-reading of the Big Book” and the “reading of approved printed matter on alcoholism.” This reference to other printed materials on alcoholism meant that the good old timers who had discovered particularly useful things for alcoholics to read would take steps to make sure that this material was available for the other A.A. members to look at.

This is the practice which is still followed today in A.A. in the St. Joseph river valley by both Mable (the secretary at the Michiana Central Service Office in South Bend) and Alice (the secretary at the Central Service Office in Elkhart). Mable and Alice work on the general principle that *everyone* in town does not have to agree that a particular book is good — this is very important — but that if a particular work is recommended by some at least of the wiser and more knowledgeable A.A. or Al-Anon old timers — people with quality experience in the program — they will carry the book. So they have a wide variety of volumes, including meditational books and materials on spirituality, works by both A.A. and non-A.A.

authors, studies by psychologists and other experts on alcoholism, and important books on various topics in A.A. history. If it is a decent book you can almost guarantee that it will be available there, but if for any reason they do not have a copy in stock, they will cheerfully order one for you, and phone you the moment it arrives.

## Varieties of Spiritual Experience

One book written by a non-A.A. author that was cited over and over again by A.A. writers from the very beginning, was a book by the psychologist William James called *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. He stressed the fact that there were a number of very different kinds of spirituality. There was a type based on a sudden highly emotional conversion experience. There were other types in which a long, gradual educational experience took place. There was the religion of healthy mindedness, as James called it (New Thought was one version of that), and another form designed to deal with what he called the torment of the divided self. In addition, James pointed out, at all points in religious history all over the world, there had been various kinds of spirituality involving mystical experiences of the divine realm which could be felt but not described in words.

It was necessary to have different kinds of spirituality, James said, because human beings fell into different kinds of psychological types. A small percentage of people were of a psychological type which could only make a significant spiritual breakthrough by having a dramatic conversion experience. When psychologically tested, among other things, many of them tended to be people of the sort who were especially susceptible to post-hypnotic suggestion. But it was futile to try to produce a spectacular conversion experience of this sort among people of other psychological types.

The attempt to make born-again Protestant revivalists or Catholic or Hindu mystics out of everyone was doomed to failure from the start.

Any attempt therefore to enforce a rigid uniformity upon everyone in A.A., even if it were, for example, a meditational book where each reading was voted on by all the delegates assembled in New York, would either drive large numbers of people out of the program, or be so bland and trivial that it would be no more than a kind of pre-chewed spiritual baby food which would be of little help to people desiring real spiritual meat and potatoes.

So when A.A. is healthy in any particular locality, there will be different kinds of A.A. meetings reading different things and using different approaches. To give a simple example, the first division in South Bend A.A. after it had begun was a split (involving the formation of a separate breakaway meeting) between those who followed Ken Merrill and preferred a type of A.A. which stressed the psychological aspects of recovery,<sup>69</sup> and those who followed Harry Stevens<sup>70</sup> and wanted a variety of A.A. that was more oriented towards traditional religious language. This did not weaken A.A. in South Bend, but in fact helped it grow and flourish. Newcomers could decide which approach made the most sense to them.

There are A.A. people who are round pegs, and others who are square pegs, and others who are triangular pegs. Trying to force square pegs into round holes, and so on, does nobody any good.

### **The historical roots of A.A.**

Only a very small portion of the traditional A.A. reading matter was published by the New York A.A. headquarters. Attempts by a few people nowadays to create rules saying that only New York A.A. literature can be used in A.A. meetings or sold by A.A. groups or intergroups, are dangerous. They would, if they were successful,

totally cut A.A. off from most of its historical roots. What would result would not in fact be A.A. anymore, at least not in any form which the good old-timers would have recognized. It would be some sort of dogmatic, rule-bound neo-fundamentalism. Following mechanical rules, no matter how well-intended the authors of these rules, never got anyone sober. People who turn to authoritarian fundamentalist systems are excessively fearful but also extremely lazy people who do not want to take personal responsibility for themselves or their lives. And alcoholics who refuse to deal with both their many fears and their aversion to hard work and taking responsibility for themselves do not get sober.

With all its richness and variety, genuine old-time A.A. flourished and spread all over the United States and Canada, and then to all the other countries of the world. This was the period of A.A.'s rapid growth, and the period which saw incredibly high success rates in getting alcoholics sober and keeping them sober. If we want to see a true revival of the old A.A. spirit, one of the best ways to accomplish this is to sit at the feet of the good old-timers, and read what they read, and do the things that they report that they did.

The good old-timer Ed Pike the railroad man probably put it as well as anyone. When he first started going to A.A. meetings, "I just made a deal with myself," he said, "that I will do anything that they tell me they do — anything — and if I'm big enough, I'll do it."

## Appendix 2

# Nick Kowalski's List of Early A.A. Figures

*Editor's note: Towards the end of his life, Nick Kowalski prepared a short handwritten account, more a set of lists than a narrative, of the people and some of the events involved in the early history of A.A. in South Bend, Indiana. It is said that he had to do extensive research to prepare it. Although this account was certainly based partially on his own personal memories, the nature of the lists shows that he also had access to actual files and documents from that period. This may have included a set of old files from the South Bend A.A. Central Service Office which were still in that office up until 1991 or 1992, not that long before the research for this book was started. Tragic to say, by the summer of 1993 these files had disappeared and have never been seen or heard of since.*

*Nick's handwritten account is therefore the only surviving record of what was in a number of now lost documents, and is perhaps the single most valuable surviving written source for the beginnings of A.A. in the St. Joseph river valley. Nick's handwriting was ambiguous on several of the capital letters, so that (on last initials in particular) the alternate possibilities or the best guesses*

*are given in brackets [ ] in the following transcript. His punctuation has been left exactly the way he wrote it. The editor of the present volume has supplied, when possible, last names and other identifying notes after each paragraph in Nick's List. The paragraph numbers have also been added, and were not in the original handwritten manuscript.*

*Nick began with an apology for any inaccuracies in his account, but in fact it is clear that he did a truly outstanding job in discovering an incredible amount of detail about early South Bend A.A.*

1. It is probably impossible to be completely accurate as to exact names, dates and places without a lot of further extensive research.

2. A.A. was founded February 22, 1943, by two men, "Mr. Sue C. and Ken M." Within six months there were five members and eight at the end of year 1943. At the end of 1944 there were twenty-three. These early members were, not in exact order — Al W. — Toledo — Army Captain from Philadelphia Russ G. — Plymouth — Bill N. — Chicago Wy S. — Mac O. — Ed Y. — Wilbur Y. — Mike O. [A?I?] — Ted D. — Larry G. — Fred C. — Harry S. — Clyde Mc. — Jim O. — Jim M. — Gill E. — Bob D. — Russ R. — John H. — Les B. — Spud C. — Chuck K. — Vern M. — John M. — Frank D. — Mac Mc. — Claude [R?]. There were many more not mentioned as we do not have accurate record at present.

3. Other early members were Swede E. — John D. — Lefty R. — Ed S. — Stan I. — Dewy S. — Lloyd W. — Carl R. — Dan O. [A?I?] — Walter S. — Chuck K. — Bob Z. — Vendetta N. — Tom H. — Guss [F?] Vic E. — Ray M. — Pat [P?] — Cleon S. — Alan S. — plus many more.

*Editor: Ken M.'s List supplies some of the last names for these people mentioned in the second paragraph: Bob*

*Davis, Chuck Keller, Ed Young, Fred Clements, Gil Elliot, Harry Stevens, Jim McNeil, Jim O'Neil, John Henderson, John Morgan, Ken Merrill, Les Beatty, Mac Olsen, Russ Reed, Joe "Soo" Cates, Wy Spence. And for the third paragraph Ken's list gives us John Dillon and Swede Edstrom. Various people whose memories stretch back that far have given us other last names: Al Wach, Clyde McClellan, Eddie Slake the professional wrestler, Wilford Oliver "Lefty" Rightley (a whisky salesman), Pat Patterson (his wife Louise was also in the program), Ray Moore (made the call on the first two black A.A.'s), Stan Irish, Ted Dilewski (spelling?), and Vendetta Nick (from a large Mishawaka Italian family). Mike O. was possibly Mike Oklak, who got sober somewhere around 1950-52.*

*Nick used dashes in ambiguous ways, and at other times left them out when some kind of punctuation mark should have been there, so that in paragraph two, it proved impossible to clarify the section that read "Al W. — Toledo — Army Captain from Philadelphia Russ G. — Plymouth — Bill N. — Chicago Wy S." We were never able to determine, for example, whether it was Bill N. or Wy S. who had some link to Chicago, nor what that link might have been. A newspaper clipping from the South Bend Tribune from a later period, giving a brief historical account of early A.A. in that city, mentions an Army Captain as an early member, but is not clear what his name was, and Russ G. may have been a different person from the Army Captain. In Nick's defense, the way he set the names down at this point may not have been due to hastiness or carelessness, but may have accurately reflected the ambiguities in the early written sources he was working from.*

4. Early women members were Iva S. — Catherine H. — Agnes K. — Marge Mc. — Ruth C. Claire M. — Margaret R. — Marge T. — Nell B. — Louise P. — and many others. Mac K. Beth W.

*Editor: Agnes Kearns was "Big Book Agnes." Claire M. has to be a reference to Claire Morse, since there was a Claire in the program who was using Morse as her last name at one point. She may have been the same person as the Claire Crowliss whom Ellen Lantz talked about, who was a secretary at WTRC radio station in Elkhart and was very active in early Elkhart A.A. Louise Patterson was a woman whose husband Pat was also in A.A.*

5. By 1945 many out of town persons came to So. Bend A.A. Some of those who started groups in other towns were Willard C. — Ray G. — Dr. Jack S. — Elkhart. Plymouth — Russ G. — Art O [A?I?] — Casey. Laporte — Art C. and Bob G. — Zora. Joe R. Michigan City — John W. & John O. [A?I?] — Goshen — Dean B. — & Mac Mc. — Niles — Milo M. — & Eli E., Sam F. Mishawaka — Submarine Captain, Floyd W. — Ralph [S. . ?] and many others from the Pottawattomi group [should be spelled Potawatomi]. Wakarusa — Mr. Carl L. Gary — Harry F. and Harry R. Benton Harbor — Joe [F?] Bremen — Dr. Asher S.

*Editor: Art O. may be the A. W. O'K. who wrote a letter to the New York A.A. office, dated November 15, 1946, saying, "For your information we have started a group here at Plymouth with an initial five members." Some of the other people mentioned above are Dean Barnhardt, Floyd Walker, Harry Roller, Dr. Jack Swihart, and Mac McCaffery. Sam F. is possibly Sam Foley and his wife "T." Willard Chester was a prominent attorney in Elkhart, and Zora Hummel was a member of the Elkhart A.A. group*

*in 1951, but moved back to Laporte when she and her husband Jim divorced.*

*In late 1954 or early 1955, Dean Barnhardt made the first attempt to put together an overall history of how A.A. got started in Indiana in a talk which he gave at Turkey Run State Park in western Indiana. There is a copy of his talk in the New York A.A. archives. Oddly enough, although Dean's own first contact with A.A. came through traveling to South Bend to attend meetings there, the account which he wrote many years later has serious errors and confusions in the section on South Bend and Elkhart, including the mysterious statement that A.A. was established there by people from Chicago. It seems clear that when Ken Merrill and Soo Cates formed the South Bend A.A. group in February 1943, they had felt no need to make any kind of contact with the Chicago A.A. group, if they even knew about it at all. Perhaps when Dean was told that Ken came along with the M. B. Skinner Co. when it moved its factory from Chicago to South Bend, he falsely assumed that Ken had first gotten sober in Chicago, not realizing that the Skinner Co. moved to South Bend in 1928, long before A.A. even existed.*

6. The first meetings were closed until approximately Oct 1943 when a few open meetings were held Sunday mornings at the LaSalle Hotel. By 1944 there were regular open Sunday 4:00 o'clock meetings at the Civic Planning Ass. house at 117 E. Madison. Late in 1945 the first Alano Club was founded in the basement of this building. It was started and cleaned up by some of the following early members — Frank D. — Tom B. — Carl L. — Chet L. — Vern O. [A?I?], Vern M. — John M. — Mac Mc. — John E., Art W. — Bob D. — Les B. and others.

*Editor: In this paragraph we can identify Bob Davis, John Morgan, Les Beatty, and Mac McCaffery.*

7. The club stayed here until April 52 after the opened meeting moved to larger quarters at the St. Jame Ep. Church 100 block North Lafayette early in 1945, where as many as 227 people gathered at Sunday meet[ings.]

8. The Michigan City A.A. prison group was started by Harry S. and Jim Mc. after talking with warden Dowd and a lot of work was done by these men to keep it going.

*Editor: St. James Cathedral is the church where the Episcopal bishop for this part of Indiana presides. The two men whom Nick says came to visit Warden Dowd to persuade him to allow the creation of a prison A.A. group were Harry Stevens and Jim McNeil. Nick apparently did not realize it (he was a prisoner there at that time, and did not know everything that was going on outside), but Ken Merrill was also making regular visits to the warden.*

9. At an early date Mr. Ray M. was contacted by a Bill H. and Jimmy M. — and soon other colored members came in and were later introduced with Mr. Earl R. — from Chicago, into the open Sunday meeting by the South Central Group, and they became a great asset to South Bend A.A.

*Editor: This was Bill Hoover and a woman named Jimmy Miller (the two later married). Earl Redmond was a well-known member of the first black A.A. group in Chicago. Bill Williams, another member of that Chicago group, made repeated visits to South Bend and confronted some of the white members quite sternly at one point in the battle to allow black alcoholics to attend all of the South Bend A.A. meetings and sit anywhere they wished. When Nick said*

*that the early black members “became a great asset,” he meant this quite sincerely and forcefully: he and the great early black A.A. leader Brownie deeply admired one another and often worked together as a team.*

10. The original classes were given by No. 1, Wy S. — 2nd class Ed Y. 3rd Mac O. Soon a electrical engineer Art W. came to A.A. and asked to make a class on the first step. Then there were five classes for many years, by . . 1. Art W. John M. 2 Jim Mc. Russ R. 3 Les B. Wayne S. 4. Gil E. Van [S?] 5. Ken M. many came from other towns to 5th class. So. Bend was one of few groups to give classes!

*Editor: These people were Ed Young, Gil Elliot, Jim McNeil, John Morgan, Ken Merrill, Les Beatty, Mac Olsen, Russ Reed, Wayne Seaver, and Wy Spence. Unfortunately, no notes have survived outlining the materials which were presented in these beginners' classes, but much of the content may have been like that contained in the Detroit (or Washington D.C.) pamphlet, and in the closely similar instructor's outline used for the earliest classes given in Minneapolis. Because part of the factory system in South Bend and Mishawaka was connected to the automobile industry, they had strong linkages to Detroit, and set their clocks by Detroit time instead of Chicago time. Ken M. was born and spent his early childhood in Minnesota, so there may have been family linkages and visits to some of these people in later years. It is therefore not impossible that Ken might have known of the Minneapolis classes (the ones which later evolved into The Little Red Book). The South Bend beginners classes were divided up differently however from either of those earlier models, so the South Bend people were clearly drawing up their own lesson plans prepared to their own design.*

11. In 1954 the So. Central group was able to acquire 6 months Saturday radio broadcast in which all groups participated. Still have tapes of these! Les B.

*Editor: Les B. was Les Beatty, but unfortunately no one knows what happened to the tape recordings.*

12. Our first large Area banquet was held at the Oliver Hotel on the occasion of our 3rd Anniversary. [G]uest speaker was H. Austin R. President of Notre Dame — John C. — suggested A.A. was the most acting primary spiritual force in the world today. Approximately 250 attended.

*Editor: Father John Cavanaugh was president of the University of Notre Dame at that time, and came to offer his support for the South Bend A.A. group and to give his blessing to what they were doing. South Bend and Mishawaka have an extremely large Roman Catholic population, principally Polish, Hungarian, Italian, and Belgian in those days. The abnormally large number of Irish Catholics who can also be seen in local A.A. meetings is still a regular source of jokes and laughter.*

13. For the first few years we had much cooperation with articles appearing in Tribune on the activities of A.A. and our annual Xmas broadcast by Mr. Ken M.

*Editor: This was Ken Merrill, of course, the founder of South Bend A.A.*

14. June 6-7-8 1947 — The first A.A. Retreat was held at Saint Joseph College, Rensselaer, Ind. and was attended by Harry S. —

John M. — Ray G. — Jack [Q?] — Jim Mc. — Art O. [A?I?] —  
 Russ S. — Fred C. — Joe R. — Ed Y. — Les B.

*Editor: The names that can be identified are Harry Stevens, John Morgan, Jim McNeil, Fred Clements, Ed Young, and Les Beatty. This was a weekend retreat led by Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe) from Indianapolis, the author of the Golden Books and the first Roman Catholic priest to get sober in Alcoholics Anonymous. Ralph was one of the four most-published early A.A. authors (the other three being Bill Wilson of course, Richmond Walker, who wrote Twenty-Four Hours a Day, and Ed Webster, who wrote The Little Red Book). This was not actually the first retreat: Ralph had held an experimental weekend retreat at St. Joseph's College in Rensselaer in June of the previous year. But the 1947 retreat was the one that began to be noticed all over the country, because the first of the fourteen Golden Books, a booklet called The Spiritual Side, a 56-page pamphlet with a shiny gold foil cover, was handed out as a souvenir to the A.A. people who came to the retreat. Unlike the little black Twenty-Four Hour book, Father Ralph's Golden Books were not read in official A.A. group meetings in early South Bend A.A. But those members who were deeply interested in the spiritual life would form small meetings in their homes to read and study the most recent Golden Book. One old-timer told me that, in his early days in the program, those A.A. people in this general part of Michigan and Indiana whose serenity and sobriety most impressed him were invariably great fans of Father Ralph's books.*

15. 1950 We were invited by Dr. Herbert G. Mc. to start an alcoholic program at Northern Indiana State Hospital, later called Beatty Memorial.

16. Harry F. of Hammond a good friend of Dr. Mc. helped make this possible. All towns were represented, So. Bend by Les B. — who was also the first representative on our third legacy. Meeting in Indianapolis Les was accompanied by Lefty R.

*Editor: Lefty (Wilford Oliver) Rightley and Les Beatty. Ed Pike said the program at Beatty Memorial Hospital was begun in 1948, not 1950 (see his story at the end of Chapter 13 in this second volume). It could not be determined who had the correct date, Nick or Ed.*

17. On August 6, 1953 — Les B. was asked to introduce to the Indiana Commissioners on alcoholism and hospital Doctors the better than 40% recovered alcoholics whom AA groups had sponsored over a two year period on voluntary 10 [day] or 2 wk commitments.

18. Some of the first secretaries were Wy S. — Jim Mc. — Russ R. — John M. — and Vern M. — John D. Art W. — Swede E. — Gill E. [Lefty?] Charles T. — and many others.

*Editor: Art Wilson, Gil Eliot, Jim McNeil, John Dillon, John Morgan, Russ Reed, Swede Edstrom, Wy Spence, and perhaps Lefty (which was the nickname given Wilford Oliver Rightley). When Nick wrote "10 or 2 wk commitments," he meant ten days, not ten weeks; see the story Ed Pike told at the end of Chapter 13 in this second volume, about taking a dying alcoholic to Beatty Memorial Hospital and signing him in for their ten-day program. A 40% success rate for a residential treatment program of that sort was extremely good, but given the major A.A. involvement in this treatment process, they probably were attaining that kind of figure. During the 1950's, A.A. pioneer Sgt. Bill S. was achieving a well-documented 50% success rate in San Antonio, Texas, using his Lackland*

*Model of alcoholism treatment, which combined good psychiatric help with the active involvement of the local A.A. groups in the entire process.*<sup>71</sup>

19. This is only a partial and totally incomplete and somewhat inaccurate report. Many days of many people will be required to accurately give a factual report. 1st split from one, closed meeting was late in 1945 at 305 E. [Wenger?] Split into No. — So., & Pottawottomie Groups, next split No #2 and Calvert — soon changed name to So. Central.

*Editor: The first split in South Bend A.A. — creating two closed meetings each week instead of one — arose from a division between those (including Harry Stevens) who wanted to put more emphasis on the spiritual side of the program, and those (led by Ken M., the founder) who wanted to put greater emphasis on the psychological aspects. Obviously, since Ken M. was a pillar of the church he attended and had no hostility at all toward God and religion, for him this dispute was over which parts of the program to spend the most time talking about, and was not seen as any either-or choice between God and psychology.*<sup>72</sup>

## **Appendix 3**

# **List of Early A.A. Members**

**from the Sources Used in Preparing These Two Volumes**

### **South Bend**

Agnes Kearns (“Big Book Agnes”), Al Paris, Al Wach, Alan S., Art W. (electrical engineer), Art Wilson, Augie, Beth W., Bill Hoover (he eventually married Jimmy Miller), Bill N., Bob Davis, Bob Z., Brownie (Harold) Brown (his wife was Evelyn), Carl Kish, Catherine H., Cedric Coleman, Charles T., Chet L., Claude (R?), Cleon S., Clyde McClellan, Dan O (A?I?), Danny Neenan, Don H., Dunbar, Ed Young, Eddie Slake, Ezell Agnew (his wife was Eleanor), Frank D., Fred Clements, George Lynn, Gil Elliot, Guss (F?), Harry Stevens, Iva S., J. T. (Jeff) R., Jack (Q?), Jim McNeil, Jim O’Neil, Jimmy Miller (a woman, she eventually married Bill Hoover), John Dillon, John E., John Henderson, John Morgan, Joseph Soulard Cates (people called him “Soo” or “Joe”), Ken Merrill, Larry G., Lefty (Wilford Oliver) Rightley, Les Beatty, Lester Smith (his wife was Amelia), Louise Patterson (her husband was Pat), Mac K. (a woman), Mac Olsen, Margaret R., Marge Mc., Marge T., Mike O. (Mike Oklak?), Mitch C., Nell B., Nick Kowalski, Pat Patterson (his wife was Louise), Pat Wilkie (her husband was Tony), R. J. Newhouse (his wife was Grace), Ray Moore, Red Knaak, Ruby McMillan, Russ Reed, Russ S., Ruth C.,

Spud C., Stan Irish, Swede Edstrom, Ted Dilewski (sp?), Tom B., Tom H., Tony Wilkie (Pat was his wife), Van (S?), Vendetta Nick, Vern M., Vern O (A?I?), Vic E., Walter S., Wayne Seaver, Wilbur Y., Wy Spence

## **Mishawaka**

Carl R., Clyde McQ., Dewey S., Floyd Walker, Frank R., George S., James C., Joe D. (Mishawaka or Michigan City?), Lloyd W. (= LA. W.?), Pat R. (a man), Paul B., Ralph (S. . . ?), Russell A.

## **Elkhart**

Art (Arthur W.) Kistner M.D., Betty O., Bill Peters, Billie Close (a woman), Chuck Keller, Chuck Smith, Claire Crowless and Claire Morse (there is a strong possibility that this is the same woman, who changed her last name after she got married or divorced), Clint Becker, Earl Brandon, Ed Pike, Ellen Lantz, Harold Fletcher, Helen Leppert, Jack (Leonard F?) Swihart M.D. (Louise was his wife), John Teall, Marion Marshall, Marty Gallagher, Mary Jane G., Paul Draper, Ray G., Sam Auel, Sue Swain, Willard Chester, Zora Hummel (moved to Laporte after divorce from Jim)

## **Goshen**

Clifford S., Dean Barnhardt, George Mills, Goshen Bill (William Henry Caldwell), Mac McCaffery

## **Other cities and towns in northern Indiana and southern Michigan**

*Benton Harbor MI:* Joe [F?]

*Bremen IN:* Dr. Asher S.

*Constantine MI:* Kenneth White

*Gary IN:* Harry F., Harry Roller, Juanita P., Ken K., Spike W.

*Huntington IN:* Pete and Mabel

*Kosciusko county (North Webster, Syracuse, Warsaw) IN:* Fred Clark in North Webster (his wife was Bea) founded the first meeting in the county on September 30, 1946 and died in 1987 with forty-one years of sobriety. Bob M. in Syracuse came into the program on December 19, 1959: he was interviewed by Frank N. (Syracuse) and G. C., and was a good source of information on early A.A. in Kosciusko county. Also Bill Mollenhour (editor of the *Warsaw Times-Union*), Bill Peters (originally lived in Syracuse, but worked in Elkhart and eventually moved there), Goshen Bill (lived in Goshen but also attended the North Webster meeting), Joe Gray.

*Laporte IN:* Art C., Bob G., James P., Joe R., Zora Hummel (moved from Elkhart after her divorce from Jim)

*Michigan City IN:* Joe D. (Mishawaka or Michigan City?), John O [A?I?], John W.

*Middlebury IN:* Art Pedersen

*Niles MI:* Milo M., Sam F. (= Sam Foley and his wife “T”?)

*Plymouth IN:* Art O. (= A. W. O’K?), Casey, Russ G.

*Rochester IN:* Bill (attorney), Dean Barnhardt (lived in Rochester when he first came in), Myra Smith (her husband was president of the town’s bank), Van (attorney, head of the Indiana state highway department)

*Wakarusa IN:* Carl L.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>CHAPTERS 1-3: 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.

<sup>2</sup>See Ken M.’s Christmas message over radio station WSBT in 1944, in volume one of this work, *The Factory Owner and the Convict*, ch. 12, “Ken and Soo Start Their A.A. Group.”

<sup>3</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>4</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 Sgt. Bill S. with Glenn F. Chesnut, *On the Military Firing Line in the Alcoholism Treatment Program*, Hindsfoot Foundation (New York: iUniverse, 2003), 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>5</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>6</sup>When describing Satan, the ancient Greek texts speak of *ho misokalos phthonos* or *ho philoponêros daimôn*. 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>7</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 the first volume of this work, *The Factory Owner & the Convict*, chapters 9-11 and 14-16.

<sup>8</sup>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 has been carrying on Brownie’s work in South Bend (and keeping Brownie’s meetings at 616 Pierce Street going) is Raymond I., who came into the program in 1974, and had first Brownie and then Bill Hoover as his sponsors.

<sup>9</sup>CHAPTER 4: From a conversation at the monthly Elkhart/Goshen A.A. old-timers’ luncheon (an informal gathering at Peddler’s Village restaurant to eat and chat) during the summer of 1995.

<sup>10</sup>See Nick Kowalski’s List in the appendix to this volume.

<sup>11</sup>From various leads given by the grandson and the grandson’s wife at A.A. open meetings in Elkhart and South Bend, 1993–95.

<sup>12</sup>Ken M.’s letter to Ed Young in 1960.

<sup>13</sup>Ken M.’s daughter Martha P. remembered that Soo Cates’ widow Henrietta married an Elkhart Keller, and when she was first asked about this, assumed that this must have been Granville Keller. Martha herself knew a Mrs. Kathlyn Blackburn, who was the daughter of Granville Keller, but on further investigation it turned out that Granville’s wife

(Kathlyn's mother) was Kathryn Collins Keller, not Henrietta. Martha did however believe that Granville Keller was in A.A. also. The Elkhart City Directory for 1960 lists:

**Keller, Chas F** (Henrietta D) pres-treas Whitcomb & Keller Elkhart Corp h1535 Lawndale rd

**Keller, Granville W** (Cathryn W) dir Miles Labys Inc rFort Myers Beach Fla

**Keller, Henrietta D** Mrs v-pres-sec Whitcomb & Keller Elkhart Corp r1535 Lawndale rd

**Whitcomb & Keller Elkhart Corp**, Charles F Keller Pres-Treas, Henrietta D Keller V Pres Sec, Real Estate, Residence and Business Property, Mortgage Loans 424 S 2d, Tel Jackson 2-6800

Granville Keller died on May 8, 1979 in Fort Myers Beach, Florida. His obituary on p. 34 of the Elkhart *Truth* for May 9, 1979 says that he was seventy-seven years old and died of a heart attack, and that he was survived by "his wife, the former Kathryn Collins, Elkhart; a daughter, Mrs. Kathlyn Blackburn, Elkhart; a brother, George E., South Bend; and two grandchildren." It says that he "was a director of Miles Laboratory for 38 years," but also that he was associated with the large Whitcomb & Keller real estate business for thirty years. Even the daughter, Mrs. Blackburn, is deceased now, so Martha P.'s memory that Granville was also active in A.A. cannot be further confirmed.

<sup>14</sup>This document which is preserved in the New York A.A. Archives is a transcript of a talk delivered at Indianapolis in late 1954 or early 1955, by Dean Barnhardt (the spelling of the last name was not clear and may be off by a letter or two), who had spent two years doing research for an article on A.A. in Indiana. He was more interested in the spread of A.A. from Evansville in southwestern Indiana (1940) to Indianapolis in the center of the state (later that same year) and then to Fort Wayne over in the extreme northeast (in 1941) than he was in the early A.A. groups formed in South Bend and the surrounding north central area during the period from 1943 to 1945. But he knew of Charles F. Keller, and that he had played an important role in establishing A.A. in Elkhart.

<sup>15</sup>*Elkhart City Directory* for the years 1960, '61, and '62.

<sup>16</sup>From the two tape recordings of Ellen Lantz speaking (see chs. 6-8 in this volume) made August 1985 and September 5, 1985.

<sup>17</sup>The two tape recordings of Ellen Lantz (see previous note). Nick Kowalski's List (in an appendix to this volume) included a *Claire M.* as one of the early A.A. people, and Ken M.'s daughter Martha P. (telephone conversation with G.C., the editor of this volume, Spring 1993) remembered a Claire who was active and thought that the last name might have been *Morse*. Two different Claire's? Or a woman's last name changing with a divorce or marriage?

<sup>18</sup>From a conversation which G.C. had with Marty Gallagher at the monthly A.A. old-timers' luncheon at Peddler's Village on May 27, 1993. Since Ellen Lantz said that the doctor's wife, whom she knew well, was named Louise, the only physician named Swihart who had a spouse named Louise in the Elkhart City Directories for that early period (e.g. 1953, 1955) was Leonard F. Swihart, an eye, ear, nose and throat specialist with his office at 214 W. Marion and his residence at 2120 Broadmoor Drive, an address which is just a house or two off Greenleaf Boulevard (which was the major road running along the north bank of the St. Joseph river in that section of Elkhart). Was "Jack" a nickname? Marty said that Dr. Swihart lived on Circle (not Broadmoor). This presumably meant the little street called The Circle, which runs off Greenleaf Boulevard three blocks to the west of Broadmoor. Assuming that Marty remembered the right part of town but the wrong street, the doctor in question was most likely Leonard F. Swihart.

<sup>19</sup>The Elkhart City Directory for 1955 listed a physician named Arthur W. Kistner, wife Ruth G., office at 421 S. 2nd St. (rm 400), and home at 800 Middlebury. Later directories (e.g. 1966, 1968) indicated they had by then moved to a home out in the country on rural delivery route 3.

<sup>20</sup>G.C.'s conversation with Marty Gallagher on May 27, 1993 (note18) and the two tapes of Ellen Lantz (see notes 16 and 28).

<sup>21</sup>CHAPTER 5: Nick Kowalski's List in the appendix, although primarily a listing of early South Bend A.A. members and some of their

activities, is the source for many of the names of people from other towns and cities given in this chapter.

<sup>22</sup>Ellen Lantz, reminiscences, in the taped interview with Stan E., archives chairman for Elkhart county A.A., on September 5, 1985.

<sup>23</sup>From the national A.A. archives at the New York headquarters.

<sup>24</sup>Nick's List.

<sup>25</sup>Molly S. says that, although Mac is now dead, his son, J. McC., is in the A.A. program in the southern Michigan/north central Indiana area.

<sup>26</sup>Ellen Lantz's reminiscences, Sept. 5, 1985.

<sup>27</sup>Doherty Sheerin in Indianapolis, a good Irish Catholic, was also the person who brought the Indianapolis priest Father Ralph Pfau into the program on November 10, 1943, and served till the end of his life as Ralph's sponsor. Dohr was a retired Indianapolis businessman. Father Pfau was the first Roman Catholic priest to get sober in A.A., and later, under the pen name of Father John Doe, wrote the famous Golden Books and other books on A.A. He was the third or fourth most published A.A. author in the early days. Father Ralph, who would not have said such a thing lightly, said after Dohr's death that he believed that he had been one of the genuine saints.

<sup>28</sup>CHAPTER SIX: The excerpts in this chapter are interwoven from statements made in two tape recordings of Ellen L. speaking, both recorded shortly before her death, marked \* or \*\* to indicate which session: \* Ellen L.'s lead given in August 1985. \*\* Ellen L. when she was interviewed by Stan E., the Archives Chairman for Elkhart County A.A., on September 5, 1985.

<sup>29</sup>The *Elkhart City Directory* for 1947-48 listed Leon E. Lantz and his wife Ellen M. as the owners of Lee's Service Station, at 1403 W. Franklin Street, residence R44.

<sup>30</sup>The *Elkhart City Directories* for this general period (e.g. 1953, 1955), gave the residence for Leon E. and Ellen M. Lantz as 1022 Monroe. He was a driver for Days Transfer, and she was described as a finisher or factory worker for Whitehall Pharmaceuticals.

<sup>31</sup>CHAPTER 7: All the excerpts in this chapter are drawn from the taped reminiscences of Ellen Lantz when she was interviewed by Stan E., the archives chairman for Elkhart county A.A., on September 5, 1985.

<sup>32</sup>See the book by the A.A. old timer who developed the Lackland Model of alcoholism treatment in the 1950's, Sgt. Bill S., *On the Military Firing Line in the Alcoholism Treatment Program*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on the History of Alcoholism Treatment (New York: iUniverse, 2003), Chapter 15, "The Effects of Alcohol on Our Emotional Development," pp. 235-253, espec. p. 237. Bill, a Pearl Harbor survivor, got sober in A.A. after the Second World War in 1948 on Long Island, and (with the backing of Mrs. Marty Mann, the first woman to obtain long term sobriety in A.A., and the head of the National Council on Alcoholism) developed a kind of treatment program which combined good psychiatry with active A.A. involvement in the treatment process and achieved a fifty percent success rate even in the difficult environment found on American military bases.

<sup>33</sup>The *Elkhart City Directory* for 1966 listed L. E. Lantz (wife Ellen) as a mechanic at Nickles Bakery, with their home at 2613 Eddy.

<sup>34</sup>This story of how Senator Hughes, Mrs. Marty Mann, and a number of other prominent people who were recovered alcoholics, worked together behind the scenes to get the key legislation passed and effectively implemented, is the subject of a good and very readable book by Nancy Olson, *With a Lot of Help from Our Friends: The Politics of Alcoholism*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on the History of Alcoholism Treatment (New York: iUniverse/Writers Club Press, 2003). Nancy, who was a recovered alcoholic herself, was a key congressional aide in the U.S. Congress from 1970 to 1980. Her book is now almost required reading for top executives in United States federal government agencies and national organizations which deal with alcoholism.

<sup>35</sup>CHAPTER 8: The excerpts that follow are all taken from the tape recording of Ellen's lead which she gave in August 1985.

<sup>36</sup>This last paragraph was not part of the lead proper, but the tape recorder was left on afterwards, and the microphone recorded her giving these additional details when someone asked her about it.

<sup>37</sup>See Glenn F. Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Evagrius*, 2nd ed. (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), pp. 61-62, 101-102, and 106-107; and for more detail, Glenn F. Chesnut, "The Pattern of the Past: Augustine's Debate with Eusebius and Sallust," in John Deschner, L. T. Howe, and K. Penzel, eds., *Our Common History as Christians: Essays in Honor of Albert C. Outler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 69-95.

<sup>38</sup>As Ellen had mentioned elsewhere, she began every morning by reading in the little meditational book called *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, which had been put together in 1948 by an early A.A. member, Richmond Walker, at the request of the A.A. group in Daytona Beach, Florida. This was an extremely important book in northern Indiana A.A. We remember that Jimmy Miller also said that she read it every morning. Brownie and Goshen Bill both cited passages from it in their leads. In discussion meetings, whenever the old timers would talk, one would hear continual echoes of phrases and verbal images from that book. The fine print sections in each day's reading were made up in large part of practical meditative exercises to help people learn how to sense and become aware, at the deepest feeling level, of the divine love which surrounds us all the time.

<sup>39</sup>Words by Frances R. Havergal (1836–1879), as given in *The Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville, Tennessee: Board of Publication of The Methodist Church, 1966), Hymn No. 187, "Take My Life, and Let It Be Consecrated." The note at the top of the hymn says that the words are based on Romans 12:1.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup>Romans 12:1–3, my translation. Ellen probably used the King James Version: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

<sup>42</sup>CHAPTER 9: 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>43</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>44</sup>When he gave the lead in 1981 which was tape recorded, he said that he had been sober seventeen years.

<sup>45</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, is put in the 'right' relationship with God] by *pistis* without need of works of the law."

<sup>46</sup>CHAPTER 10: 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 42). The citation from the Big Book can be found in *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 3rd. ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1976), p. 58.

<sup>47</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 G. the second of Toledo, 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. into the program. He arranged for Submarine Bill to actually serve as Glenn's sponsor, but Bill kept Larry informed of how Glenn was doing at all times 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 all attended. Bob was Bill's sponsor. For many years, Bob and Bill (along with Glenn) had lunch every Friday at the Hot Dog House in Mishawaka, Indiana: pastrami sandwiches on rye bread (two with brown Belgian mustard and one with yellow American mustard), and side orders of French fried potatoes, fried onion rings, and kosher dill pickles. The owner, a Greek named Orestes, knew their orders by heart, and loved them so much (although he was not in the program and probably did not even know that they were in A.A.) that he frequently refused to take more than a fraction of the meal's cost.

<sup>48</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>49</sup> Brownie made this passage in the reading for October 11 in *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* the centerpiece for example (see chapt. 3 of this volume) in a talk he gave attacking racial discrimination in Gary, Indiana.

<sup>50</sup>CHAPTER 11: 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>51</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>52</sup>CHAPTER 12: All the excerpts in this chapter are taken from the tape recording of the lead Ed Pike gave on August 23, 1980.

<sup>53</sup>Ellen came into the program on September 7, 1947. See Ellen L., lead given in August, 1985, and reminiscences in the interview with Stan E., September 5, 1985.

<sup>54</sup> The early Christian theologians in the eastern end of the Mediterranean during the first four hundred years taught this kind of doctrine of synergism. It is the old catholic and orthodox tradition. It was not the same as the later sixteenth century teaching of the Lutheran theologian Melancthon, where God and the human being were regarded as cooperating efficient causes in bringing about that person's salvation. That was a much later and quite different idea, which was rejected by the orthodox Lutherans. The catholic and orthodox tradition of the early Church was especially not the same as the sixteenth century teaching of Arminius, who was attempting to operate within a basically Augustinian and Calvinist framework, while refusing to carry out the necessary inner logic of that set of starting presuppositions.

In Protestant circles, the old catholic and orthodox understanding of synergism was revived by John Wesley in the eighteenth century. He had read deeply, not only in the writings of the early Church, but also in the French and Spanish Catholic spiritual writers of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. This old catholic way of thinking about grace was absolutely basic, for example, to St. Teresa of Avila (1515-82) and her great work, the *Interior Castle*. Wesley's approach was especially close to that of St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) and his *Treatise on the Love of God*, since he and St. Francis were both attempting to take on the contemporary Calvinists and beat them on their own ground.

Wesley began by showing that the right kind of combination of a fundamentally *sola gratia* doctrine of the absolute primacy of grace, with a weakly synergistic element included in the right places, was the clearest, most obvious, and least contrived way of reading the New Testament. He also went behind the Augustinian and Calvinist theological presuppositions about the nature of original sin and the nature of human willing, and restored the older Christian understanding of human fallenness and God's healing of the human spirit brought about by the work of the divine spirit and the power of the incarnation (God was humanized so that we might be divinized, as St. Athanasius put it).

Wesley pointed out (correctly) that both Augustine and Calvin derived their understanding of how human beings made decisions from an extremely fatalistic version of Stoic philosophical speculation. In fact, Calvin's first published work was a book on the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca, and Augustine actually said explicitly in his *City of God* that his position was exactly the same as Seneca's, except that he did not like to use the actual word "fate," since the common people confused that with astrological fatalism. (See also the following note.)

It was the Wesleyan (catholic and orthodox) understanding of synergism which was assumed in all the meditations in *The Upper Room*, the great formative spiritual text of early A.A., which is the reason why this way of thinking about the relationship between God's grace and our human responsibility shapes the first 164 pages of the Big Book from beginning to end. The great passage on acceptance on page 449 of the third edition (page 417 in the fourth edition) — "Nothing, absolutely nothing happens in God's world by mistake" — could be interpreted in terms of an Augustinian-Calvinist doctrine of predestination, but it does not have to be. A Wesleyan, Eastern Orthodox, or Catholic theologian would interpret that sentence as saying that nothing happens in God's world unless (a) God wills it to happen or (b) God allows it to happen. In fact, that is exactly what the Roman Catholic priest Ralph Pfau ("Father John Doe") does in one of the Golden Books which he wrote for his fellow A.A. members.

A God who allows human beings to have a certain amount of free will — who wants a universe in which human beings are more than simply puppets dancing blindly and unfeelingly while he pulls the strings — is going to have to allow human beings to make bad decisions as well as good decisions. A God who wants to create human beings who can love him back, has to give them the freedom to decide whether they want to love him back or not, and whether they want to create goodness and beauty and positive things, or launch destruction into the universe around them instead.

<sup>55</sup>In old-fashioned high Calvinist predestinarianism, it was believed that all truly saving grace was irresistible. In the more synergistic understanding of grace which appears in most A.A. thought (see the third paragraph of note 60), it is believed instead that although an act of

divine grace may on some occasions be totally irresistible in its power at the time God first touches my mind, this irresistible quality will gradually weaken in the days that follow. Ultimately, human beings have to will *to continue accepting* that gift of grace and *use it*, in order for its positive effects to continue and give rise to yet further gifts of grace. Grace unused is grace that withers on the vine.

<sup>56</sup>Hebrews 11:1 is an extremely important passage, because it is the only place in the New Testament where the all-important word “faith” is actually defined. (There are many other passages which discuss the *contents* of faith, but that is not the same thing as defining what the word itself means.) I have given here a very free (!!!) but I believe totally accurate translation of what is actually being said in that verse in the original Greek — *estin de pistis elpizomenôn hypostasis, pragmatôn elenchos ou blepomenôn* — rendered in the King James Version as “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” *Hypo-stasis* means in this case, not the philosophical technical term “sub-stance,” but the notion of the “sub-stratum” which lies below everything else. In everyday ancient Greek usage, for example, the word *hypostasis* can refer to the row of stones at the bottom of a structure which serve as the supporting foundation for everything else. *Elenchos* refers in Greek to any kind of proof or verification, or any method of observation or kind of awareness, which can enable us to determine what is true and what is not true. “Things not seen,” in this theological context, refers to the invisible realm of the heavenly spirit, as opposed to the visible world of matter (as in the phrase “maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible” in the Nicene Creed, which sets out the same symbolic dichotomy between earthly things which are visible, and heavenly things which are invisible even though very real).

<sup>57</sup>CHAPTER 13: All the excerpts in this chapter are again taken from that tape recording of the lead Ed Pike gave on August 23, 1980.

<sup>58</sup>After 1948, the book *God Calling*, by Two Listeners, was another major source of genuine evangelical teaching of the best sort, imported into the A.A. movement via Richmond Walker’s adaptation of its words and ideas in his *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*. The two women who wrote *God Calling* discovered that real spirituality is based on becoming aware

of God's immediate presence at all times, in our hearts and all around us, and learning to call upon his love and help to obtain both inner peace and real strength of purpose. In the United States, *God Calling* in its original pre-A.A. version is still one of the four or five best selling books in evangelical book stores.

<sup>59</sup> The Big Book was never intended to supply us with a fully formed spiritual discipline, but something more like a “meta-spirituality,” that is, something which for the most part was a description of only the general structure which any spiritual program would need to have in order to be fully effective. We must each of us take this basic outline and fill it in with many additional metaphors, symbols, and specific prayers and practices, employing those which seem to be the most helpful to each of us as individuals. Since we all have different personalities, different backgrounds, and different kinds of spiritual problems plaguing our souls, each individual will need to develop his or her own unique spiritual discipline within that twelve-step framework.

<sup>60</sup> APPENDIX 1: It is a serious mistake to regard all evangelicals as the same. Even at the very beginning, when the modern evangelical movement first began in the 1740's (in England and the Thirteen Colonies) there were two basic strands, which held many principles and practices in common, but nevertheless strongly disagreed on others. Jonathan Edwards, a Congregationalist pastor in colonial Massachusetts (who was elected president of Princeton University at the very end of his life), was the greatest early representative of the variety of evangelical thought which tended to be strongly Calvinist, and drew most of its fundamental assumptions from Augustine, the great African saint who wrote at the time the Roman empire was collapsing, just prior to the beginning of the middle ages.

John Wesley, a priest of the Church of England who taught New Testament and classical Greek and Latin at Oxford University in England, was the greatest early representative of the other kind of evangelical thought. He was strongly anti-Calvinist, regarded himself as a member of the Anglo-Catholic tradition instead, and drew most of his fundamental theological assumptions not from Augustine (the great theologian of the Latin-speaking western half of the Roman empire), but from the Greek and Syriac fathers of the early church over in the eastern

half of the empire: Clement of Alexandria, Macarius the Egyptian, Ephraem Syrus, and so on. (John Wesley could read French, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, and Aramaic, as well as the classical Arabic of the Koran, a book which he greatly admired. He also learned Spanish at one point in order to learn about Judaism from a group of Spanish Jews whom he met while trying to do missionary work among the Native Americans in colonial Georgia.)

The Wesleyan tradition gave rise to the various Methodist denominations and influenced many other Protestant evangelical groups as well. This side of the evangelical tradition strongly rejected the Calvinist idea of predestination, and spoke instead of a synergistic (co-operative) relationship between God's grace and human will power, which was the doctrine one saw among the early Christian teachers from the eastern end of the Mediterranean in the first five or six centuries. We were healed by God's grace alone, but we human beings had to co-operate with God, and he gave us the power to reject his grace if we chose to do so, and go our own way (see note 55). The Big Book characteristically speaks in this way, and Hoosier folks when talking to an A.A. group will often speak of being sober today due to "the grace of God, the help of you people, and a little bit of footwork on my part." The last phrase referred to the synergistic or co-operative element, which played only a very small part (things like making myself go to A.A. meetings and read some from something like the Big Book or the Twenty-Four Hour book every day), but was nevertheless absolutely necessary if I expected to get sober and grow in my relationship with God.

The Wesleyan/Methodist tradition also emphasized that true religion was "the religion of the heart," not "outward formal religion." Scrupulously and legalistically following church rules and rituals, and mechanically believing in all the officially enforced doctrines and dogmas which my own particular church taught, was not real spirituality. Real spirituality arose down in our hearts, at the level of our deepest feelings and desires. What God cared about was what was going on in our hearts. John Wesley insisted (on well-argued New Testament grounds) that Jews and Muslims, for example, who loved God in their hearts, and who not only *treated the other human beings around them*

*with love at all times*, but also were *able to teach other people to love*, had clearly done so only by the help of God's greatest of all gifts of grace (see 1 Corinthians 13 in context), which meant not only that they were saved, but that *God loved them fully and unequivocally*. These kinds of assumptions also helped to fundamentally shape the Big Book.

*The Upper Room* came from this Wesleyan type of evangelicalism in its strongly Catholic-leaning old-time Southern Methodist variety, which celebrated sung eucharists every month with medieval chants, using Archbishop Cranmer's English translation of the medieval Catholic Latin mass. Their ordained clergy, who were called "traveling preachers in full connection" (from the old frontier days when they were sent out on horseback into the wilderness as "circuit riders" searching for little settlements where they could preach) were under the iron rule of the Southern Methodist bishops, who could appoint them to any church post or send them into any missionary situation which they chose, in any land or country, without respect to diocesan boundaries. They were expected to preach the gospel wherever they were sent, but these pastors were also informed quietly during their seminary training that they were priests, and that performing all the traditional priestly functions was also part of their duties.

They were an interesting combination of things. They saw no reason why one could not combine the best of the Catholic tradition with the best of the Protestant tradition, although they were extremely liberal on most theological and social issues of the period, and the Catholicism was fairly low-key. During the early twentieth century, some American Methodist conferences went through a period when they officially denounced the capitalist system as intrinsically un-Christian, and declared that socialism was the only political structure which true Christians could promote and defend.

<sup>61</sup>See "*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. 281-282 and 335.

<sup>62</sup>Richard M. Dubiel, *The Road to Fellowship: The Role of the Emmanuel Movement and the Jacoby Club in the Development of*

*Alcoholics Anonymous*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on the History of Alcoholism Treatment (New York: iUniverse, 2004), pp. 132-135.

<sup>63</sup>The two women who wrote *God Calling* had discovered that real spirituality is based on becoming aware of God's immediate presence at all times, in our hearts and all around us, and learning to call upon his love and help to obtain both inner peace and strength of spiritual purpose. In the United States, *God Calling* is still one of the four or five best-selling books in evangelical book stores. There are many editions, the original edited by the important Oxford Group author A. J. Russell, but one recent edition is *God Calling* by Two Listeners, ed. Bernard Koerselman (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour and Company [Evangelical Christian Publishers Association], 1993).

<sup>64</sup>In the year 1944 "in New York City a few literary and newsminded A.A.'s began to issue a monthly publication. This original group consisted of Marty, Priscilla, Lois K., Abbott, Maeve, and Kay. Besides this, Grace O. and her husband turned up among its moving spirits." *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1957), p. 201.

<sup>65</sup>As quoted in Bill Pittman's Foreword to *The Little Red Book: An Interpretation of the Twelve Steps of the Alcoholics Anonymous Program*, 50th Anniversary Edition (Center City MN: Hazelden, 1996), pp. xiii-xiv.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>67</sup>He died sober. His niece told me that a physician gave Ralph a shot for airsickness, and inadvertently used a contaminated needle. Father Ralph contracted hepatitis, and all the efforts made by the doctors at Our Lady of Mercy Hospital in Owensboro could not save him.

<sup>68</sup>Mel B. (ed.), *Three Recovery Classics: As a Man Thinketh by James Allen, The Greatest Thing in the World by Henry Drummond, and An Instrument of Peace the St. Francis Prayer*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Spirituality (New York: iUniverse, 2004).

<sup>69</sup>The best spokesman from the early days for this important strand of A.A. thought was Sgt. Bill S., a protégé of Mrs. Marty Mann who got sober on Long Island in 1948. Bill was not an atheist or agnostic, but

felt more comfortable talking about the principles of the program in psychological terms. See Sgt. Bill S., *On the Military Firing Line in the Alcoholism Treatment Program*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on the History of Alcoholism Treatment (New York: iUniverse, 2003), which also describes how he and psychiatrist Louis Jolyon “Jolly” West, M.D., developed the Lackland Model for alcoholism treatment during the 1950’s.

<sup>70</sup>Harry Stevens, who had been one of the first four members of the South Bend group, was the outside sponsor of the A.A. prison group at the Indiana state penitentiary at Michigan City during its early years. See Nick Kowalski’s story in Volume 1 of this work.

<sup>71</sup>APPENDIX 2: See note 69. One of the most important reasons for his high success rate, Sgt. Bill said, was that he got the local A.A. groups in the surrounding area continuously and actively involved in sponsoring and supporting each individual who was in treatment, from the time that man or woman first entered the treatment program.

<sup>72</sup>Ken’s position was essentially the same as that of the famous A.A. old timer Sgt. Bill S. (see note 69), who developed one of the three classical models of A.A.-related alcoholism treatment programs in the early 1950’s. Ken may have known of Sgt. Bill’s work, which was highly publicized both inside and outside of A.A. circles by Mrs. Marty Mann’s National Council on Alcoholism. Sgt. Bill believed that enormous hostility toward God was invariably only a surface disguise for what were in reality grave psychological problems involving other areas of the person’s life. But he has often complained to me about A.A. members who talk about spirituality all the time but have obviously never done a real fourth step, and still have large amounts of unresolved anger and resentment toward everyone around them.