



GOOD NEWS



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AA HISTORY—PART 3

Similarities Seen in Youth of Bob and Bill

This is the third in a continuing series on the history of AA and the formation of the 12-Step program. Last month we began looking at the life of Bill Wilson, co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous.

By J. S. RUDOLF

Bill Wilson, however, was a bright, energetic, determined, even far-seeing man, not easily defeated. He conceived a plan to investigate American companies for their soundness and potential for

Wall Street investors. This is a familiar concept these days—in 1925, it was new and radical. The bonus, so far as Lois and Bill were concerned, was that a long period "on the road" would remove Bill from the proximity of barrooms. The couple set off with their camping gear in a Harley-Davidson motorcycle equipped with sidecar.

Unfortunately, they side-tracked early for some socializing and drinking with an old friend of Bill's, Ebby Thatcher, who will appear again in this story later. This ate up much of their traveling money, so the Wilsons took jobs on a farm near Scotia, New York: Farm labor and cooking.

Bill had already discovered that the straightforward approach to a company, asking for information, was doomed to failure. Companies had no interest in revealing anything to a stranger. The farm, however,

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Spring Meet Is Hosted By Fresno Area

The 1989 Spring Session of the Northern California Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous will be held in Fresno the week-end of March 10, 11 and 12, 1989 at the Fresno Convention Center, 700 M Street.

Angela O'K. will be the speaker at 8:30 on Friday night. Scott L. of Placerville will be the Young People's speaker at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, followed by Albert M. of Dallas, Texas on Saturday night. Sunday morning's speaker will be Eve M., Fort Lauderdale, Florida, at 11:30 a.m.

The hosts are requesting pre-registration and say that hotel reservations should be made as early as possible.

The conference offers workshops, speakers, marathon meetings, a dance, drawing, prizes, and plenty of fellowship.

Headquarters hotel for the Spring Conference will be the Hilton, not far from the Convention Center. It is not too soon to get your gang together to car-pool down to the valley. Registration forms are now available throughout the NCCAA area so act now.

San Jose's Offer For 1990 Session Accepted by NCC

The Saturday morning steering committee meeting in Redding produced only one solid bid for the 1990 Spring Session of the Conference.

At the delegates meeting in the afternoon, there was lively discussion on the proposal put forth by the San Jose delegation, with the final vote sending the Conference back to the Valley.

Grapevine Book Just in Time for Christmas

The latest of the Grapevine books, "The Language of the Heart," Bill W.'s Grapevine writings, has been released and is now available at many Central Offices or by ordering directly from AA Grapevine, Inc., P.O. Box 1980, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163-1980.

History of Early Lives Is Similar for Bob and Bill

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was situated next door to some laboratories belonging to General Electric. Bill met some GE employees (in a bar) and soon had himself an unofficial tour of the facilities and a full discussion of future plans and experiments. Perfect info for Wall Street.

Next, at giant Portland Cement in Pennsylvania, Bill got himself a job in the plant and discovered that this was a golden investment opportunity. Wall Street was impressed with his finds, and the Wilsons now had the financial backing to make a long, wide-ranging fact-finding tour from Florida to Canada.

No alkie will be surprised to hear that the trip did not cure Bill's drinking problem. Back in Brooklyn, working on Wall Street, Bill drank his way home (unless he collapsed on the way) at night, got into fights, had anxiety attacks. Like most other

stock market investors in the late 20's, the Wilsons were living high. But also like others, many of their holdings were paper ones, and Bill had been buying on the margin. So when Black Thursday called in its markers (October 24, 1929), and the market crashed, the Wilsons were left \$60,000 in debt, living in an apartment they could no longer afford. They moved in with Lois' parents.

Bill was fired because of his drinking and public brawling. Lois kept food on the table by working in department stores. Bill had blackouts and was even threatened with blackmail. He stole money from Lois' purse and secretly pawned household items to buy booze. He was physically ill and emaciated. In 1933-34 Bill was in Towns Hospital four times to "dry out."

Dr. Silkwood's Theory

Towns Hospital was the home base of Dr. William D. Silkworth, a very important person in the chain of people that led to AA. The American Medical Association at this time viewed alcoholism as a moral weakness, not a medical concern. Drunks had no willpower, or chose not to exercise it. Dr. Silkworth, after years of working with alcoholics, was sure that there was a physiological component: Drunks had a physical intolerance (he called it an allergy) to alcohol. This, coupled with a mental obsession with drink, meant that an alcoholic could not have alcohol

at all, not even one drink. Willpower had nothing to do with it.

Dr. Silkworth hit Bill with a double whammy. First, he made it clear that he foresaw imminent brain damage and eventually insanity. Bill would soon have to be locked up in an asylum. Second, he explained his theory of intolerance and obsession. This made sense to Bill: It was "scientific," and it fitted in with his own experience.

It would be lovely to say that at this point Bill turned his life around, but not so. There were still some links in the chain missing. Bill continued to drink, continued to slide down into an alcoholic hell, which included *delerium tremens* now. Then he had a visit from Ebby Thatcher (remember Ebby?). Ebby was sober now; he had "got religion" from the Oxford Group, a religious movement that emphasized taking stock of oneself, confessing personal defects, making restitution, and in the case of alcoholics, admitting defeat to booze. Sound familiar?

Ebby had found the Oxford Group through Rowland Hazard, an alcoholic who had actually gone to Switzerland to see Carl Jung about his inability to stop drinking. Jung had finally told Rowland that his case was hopeless unless he experienced some kind of "religious conversion." The Oxford Group provided that spiritual experience. From Rowland H. and Carl Jung to Ebby T. to Bill W.—the links were coming together.

The Spiritual Component

Bill was not convinced by Ebby; it seemed like incredible (See "History," Page 4)

GOOD NEWS

Newsletter of the
Northern California Council
of Alcoholics Anonymous

Articles of interest to our readers are welcomed and may be mailed to the editor at:

Post Office Box 64090,
Sunnyvale CA 94088-4090

Deadlines for Material

December 10 for January-February
February 10 for March-April
April 10 for May-June
June 10 for July-August
August 10 for September-October
October 10 for November-December

Talk About Elections! Try This!

Spirituality and politics? Can't mix, never will. All that campaigning and competition is terrible, and let's stay as far away from it as possible. Our *trusted servants* are nuts!

I have heard this attitude expressed in many ways in my years in the fellowship, and I smile to myself as I look at the calendar. I can hardly wait for upcoming elections. Forget everything you ever knew about politics and come with me to an AA election, where the real heart of our program can be seen.

There is no campaigning. You will know the people who are available for office if they have been the sort of hard workers we need. You will have seen them at business meetings all over the place, sharing experience, strength and hope on the worker's side of AA. There will be a roll call of everyone who is eligible for the office (let's take Delegate for example)—all current area officers, district committee members and chairs are eligible, and the names are called of all who are present.). Anyone who feels available says, "Available" and that name goes up on the board. When all are listed, each takes a couple of minutes to describe service history only. That's the campaign. No "vote for X, 'cause Y can't cut it!" Just, "Here I am, experienced and willing."

And so we vote. We are registered, and there are counters from another area. These are the precautions we take. Written

ballots go in. Should someone get two-thirds of the vote we'd have a Delegate. But there will probably be another round of voting. As each vote is taken the lowest numbers are eliminated leaving two (or three in case of a tie) for the final choice. Still no one has two-thirds? Then our Higher Power steps in and the two names are placed in a hat. One name is drawn, and we have our new Delegate.

This procedure allows seven more officers to be chosen. Anyone new who goes up on the board (those not chosen as Delegate may choose to be available for something else) gives a service history.

It takes all day. The feelings get richer and people draw closer. Power plays and personalities just don't get in the way of this amazing procedure. The spirit of rotation having worked in all the groups and all the districts, many are having their first

experience in general service, and they look at those who will be guiding them in the next two years with awe and love. The new officers look back with awe and love as well. This is the beginning of an adventure. There will be some mistakes as every job is taken over by someone inexperienced. There will be some feelings of *us* and *them* as ideas are wrestled with. But a team is being forged—a very large team. Its purpose is to carry the group conscience of Alcoholics Anonymous from the groups to the Conference and from the Conference to the groups.

Want to be a part of it? Everyone is needed. Everyone is part of the collective conscience of AA. Come to an Election Assembly and feel the Spirit. Someday your name will be on the list and you will be at the microphone saying, "I was a GSR . . ."

—MARION

From all of us at NCCAA
 . . . to all of you
*a serene Christmas
 and a sober New Year*

Recipe of the Month

Take 12 fine, full-grown months, see that these are thoroughly free from old memories of bitterness, rancor, hate and jealousy. Cleanse them completely of every clinging spite; pick off all specks of pettiness and littleness—in short, see that these months are freed from all the past. Have them as fresh and clean as when they first came from the great storehouse of time.

Cut these months into 30 or 31 parts. This batch will keep for just one year; do not attempt to make up the whole batch at one time (so many people spoil the entire lot this way), but prepare one day at a time as follows:

Into each day put 12 parts of faith, 11 of patience, 10 of courage, nine of work (some people omit this ingredient and spoil the flavor of the rest), eight parts of hope, seven of fidelity, six of liberality, five of kindness, four of rest (leaving this out is like leaving the oil out of the salad—don't do it), three parts of prayer, two of meditation and one well selected resolution.

Then put in about a teaspoon of good spirits, a dash of fun, a pinch of folly, a jigger of laughter, a sprinkling of play, and a heaping cupful of good humor. Cook thoroughly in a fervent heat, garnish with a few smiles and a sprig of joy, then serve with quietness, unselfishness and cheerfulness, and a happy year is a certainty.

Reprinted from Intergroup monthly newsletter—
HERE'S HOW—December 1987

History of Founders Shows A Few Similarities Today

(Continued from Page 2)

weakness to Bill to give up his rationality, his inquiring spirit, to some nebulous faith. But Ebby was an old drinking buddy, a fellow drunk talking, so Bill was haunted by the conversation. He even went to an Oxford Group meeting; unfortunately, he was drunk at the time.

By the last time he dragged himself to Towns Hospital, Bill had regressed (or the disease had progressed), to passivity and practically to infancy. Bill was 39 years old. He faced insanity, followed by death.

It was at this low point that he had a genuine spiritual experience; he saw a brilliant light and felt an intense joyfulness, had a clear insight that the world was Divinely ordered, that everything had a purpose. A sense of presence remained when the light and intensity faded, followed by a wonderful peacefulness.

Bill thought that must finally have gone insane.

He went immediately, and fearfully, to Dr. Silkworth and asked what he thought. Dr. Silkworth was clear: "Whatever it is you've got now, hang onto it. Hang on to it, boy. It is so much better than what you had only a couple of hours ago."

Dr. Silkworth told him to ignore the past and not waste time in guilt. Chalk up past behavior to the disease, but do work on character defects that might block recovery.

Bill was soon getting together with other Oxford Group alcoholics. They shared their stories and supported each other. He spent five months racing around New York trying to reform drunks by preaching religious conversion. Lois was so grateful to see him sober and getting healthy that she had no objections. But Bill didn't save a single soul. There were still some human links missing in the AA chain.

Bill was well enough to work a little on Wall Street again, and he went to Akron, Ohio for a proxy fight. He found himself in a big hotel, alone, listening to the camaraderie from the hotel bar and craving a drink. In desperation, he picked out a minister's name from a hotel directory and phoned him, asking for the name of an alcoholic he could talk to. The minister gave him ten names. Bill phoned nine of them without finding somebody available. The tenth phone call was to Mrs. Henrietta Seiberling, who was not an alcoholic, but who had connections with the local Oxford Group. She told Bill to come over right away; she had someone she wanted him to meet.

Unfortunately, that someone, Dr. Bob, was passed out stone drunk at home under a table. The meeting would have to wait until the next day.

And the story will continue in the next issue, with the formation of AA as we know it today.

Reprinted from SOBER TIMES, San Diego

Just Someone Who Cares

When you've known the meaning of sorrow
And you're stalled at the foot of the stairs,
You'd give all that you own just to borrow
A smile from someone who cares.

When your so-called friends won't come near you,
When they deal you out of their shares,
When you cry and there's no one to hear you—
How you ache for a someone who cares.

When you've tried to come back and you're hurtin'
And the past slaps your face unawares,
You'd settle for that final curtain
If it weren't for someone who cares.

Don't despair and don't grow disenchanted,
An answer will come to your prayers,
But please don't take AA for granted,
It is there you'll find someone who cares.

Redding Was Really Ready

In October the AA's settled in Redding as the fabled swallows do in Capistrano. Conviviality was definitely the order of the day. Sunshine, warm and friendly, was provided to help our enjoyment of the fall session of the NCCAA Conference.

At Conferences, we do enjoy the work, study and discussion as well as the social pleasures we need in life.

Thanks to the NCCAA Steering Committee and the Redding Conference Committee, a whole lot of us enjoyed a great weekend, as the result of careful planning and committed action.

The main speakers were great, a mixture of people and life styles that gave everyone something to relate to, and were well received.

The committee and business meetings were lively and productive. Jim M. of Carmichael did a splendid job as main speaker at the General Service meeting Saturday. Marathon meetings, workshops, service meetings and young peoples meetings filled in the busy schedule.

Thank you, Redding. The next NCCAA Conference is in Fresno on March 10, 11 and 12, 1989.

Some Changes Were Made

In addition, or incidental to the conference: Action was taken to move the Pre-Conference or Interim Steering Committee meetings back one week and make them full business meetings. The later date is to make full expense accounting of the last conference available and the full business as opposed to speaker selection only to act on business which may be necessary due to the last conference; to introduce business to be discussed and acted upon at the next (Conference) meeting; and to have a better informed Delegate body at the conferences.

—DON S.

CCFAA Delegate to NCCAA

Prayer for the New Year

Dear God,

I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe this. I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. I hope I have that desire in everything I do. And I hope I never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it at the time.

Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost, and in the shadow of death, I will not be afraid because I know you will never leave me to face my troubles alone.

--Thomas Merton

Looking Forward

Dec. 23-26 Friday thru Monday	FAIR AVENUE FELLOWSHIP CHRISTMAS ALKATHON 1122 Fair Avenue, San Jose
JAN. 13-15	ALL CALIFORNIA YOUNG PEOPLES AA CONFERENCE Hyatt Regency Hotel, Sacramento Registration: \$5.00
FEB. 17-19	SOBER & FREE CONFERENCE Scottish Rite Temple, San Jose Registration: \$15 Advance; \$20 After Jan. 15