

Victor Valley Intergroup, Central Office, Inc.
18888 Highway 18, Suite 107
Apple Valley, CA 92307
Telephone: 760-242-9292; Email: vvigco_aa@yahoo.com;
Web site: www.victorvalleyaa.org



The Washington Post,

Wednesday, Jan. 27, 1971

Known to thousands as Bill W. Alcoholics Anonymous Founder Dies

By Donald E. Graham
Washington Post Staff Writer

Scores of thousands of people learned for the first time the name of the man who helped them recover from alcoholism when William Griffith Wilson died of pneumonia in a Miami Hospital Sunday night.

The New York headquarters of Alcoholics Anonymous announced that Mr. Wilson, retired securities analyst, was the man known as Bill W., who co-founded A.A. in 1935.

Mr. Wilson lived in Bedford Hills, NY. He was 75. Thirty-six years ago, Mr. Wilson took his last drink, ending a career of alcoholism back to his days as an officer in the First World War.

Mr. Wilson went into a New York City hospital and was detoxified – but fell into a severe depression.

“Finally it seemed to me as though I were at the very bottom of the pit,” he later wrote. “All at once I found myself crying out, ‘If there is a God, let him show himself! I am ready to do anything, anything!’”

“Suddenly the room lit up with

a great white light. It seemed to me, in the mind’s eye, that I was on a mountain and that a wind, not of air, but of spirit was blowing. And then it burst upon me that I was a free man.

“I thought to myself, ‘So this is the God of the preachers.’” Bill W. did not wait long before sharing his experience with a friend, A.A.’s other co-founder, Dr. Robert Holbrook Smith of Akron, Ohio. Once Smith stopped drinking, the two men felt they knew that alcoholics could help each other recover.

They went to an Akron hospital and met a patient who had come in suffering from delirium tremens. He, too, got off and stayed off, and helping fellow alcoholics recover became the A.A. tradition.

“They started a chain reaction, one drunk helping another,” Nance O., a congressional assistant, said yesterday. “The hand that reached out to me when I appealed for help was a link in the chain going back to Bill W. and Dr. Bob.” Bill A., an Arlington businessman, recalled that in December, 1939, when Alcoholics Anonymous

was a small, little-known group, he went to New York to meet Mr. Wilson. The next month Mr. Wilson helped start an A.A. chapter here, the fourth in the country. “He came here many times to help us with our problems,” Bill A. said, and later, when the national A.A. organization faced a financial crisis, the Washington chapter came up with the funds to rescue it.

Alcoholics Anonymous now has half a million members worldwide. “It’s by far the most successful resource of help in terms of the number of people they’ve treated,” said Augustus Hewlett, executive secretary of the North American Association of Alcoholism Programs.

Mr. Wilson retired as director of the organization in 1952.

His first book, “Alcoholics Anonymous,” written when the group had only 100 members, has sold more than 800,000 copies since it was first printed in 1939. His other books were “Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions,” “Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age,” and “The A.A. Way of Life.” Mr.

Wilson went to great lengths to preserve his anonymity. When he testified in 1969 before a congressional committee investigating alcoholism, television cameras were barred and photographs were permitted only from behind.

He turned down honorary degrees and refused to have his picture on the cover of Time magazine in order to preserve his group’s tradition of avoiding publicity as individuals.

Mr. Wilson never gave up his efforts at helping alcoholics recover. One desperate alcoholic once committed suicide in Mr. Wilson’s home. Thousands of others stopped drinking and resumed the lives that alcoholism interrupted.

Mr. Wilson was not boastful about his successes. “When you consider the enormous ramifications of this disease, we have just made a scratch on the surface,” he told [a] Senate committee in 1969. He was pleased by the increased government attention to alcoholism that followed the election of Harold Hughes, a recovered alcoholic, as Senator from

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Iowa. "This is splashdown day for Apollo," he said when Hughes first held hearings on alcoholism. "The impossible is happening."

One Washington member of A.A. said yesterday, "I don't think there's a person in A.A., from Harold Hughes to the man on the Bowery, who doesn't know that if it wasn't for Bill W. and what he started, we'd all be dead."

Mr. Wilson is survived by his wife Lois, who remained with him during his period of drunkenness and helped start the "Al-Anon" program for families of alcoholics.

Submitted by,
Kathy F., Hesperia, CA

With Much Gratitude

Here is a short list of your Central Office volunteers. We are thankful and grateful for your service.

Monday

Bill P., a.m.
Phil P., p.m.

Call Forwarding

Ruby C.,
Nancy D.,
Jo R.,

Tuesday

Sam D., a.m.
Mike E., p.m.

Wayne S.,
Susan B.,
Laura J.,

Wednesday

Julie D., a.m.
Bob R., p.m.

Kathy G.,
Steve M.,
Jeff A.,
Chad F., and
Wayne U.

Thursday

Barb E., a.m.
Eric S., p.m.

Thanks to all of you,

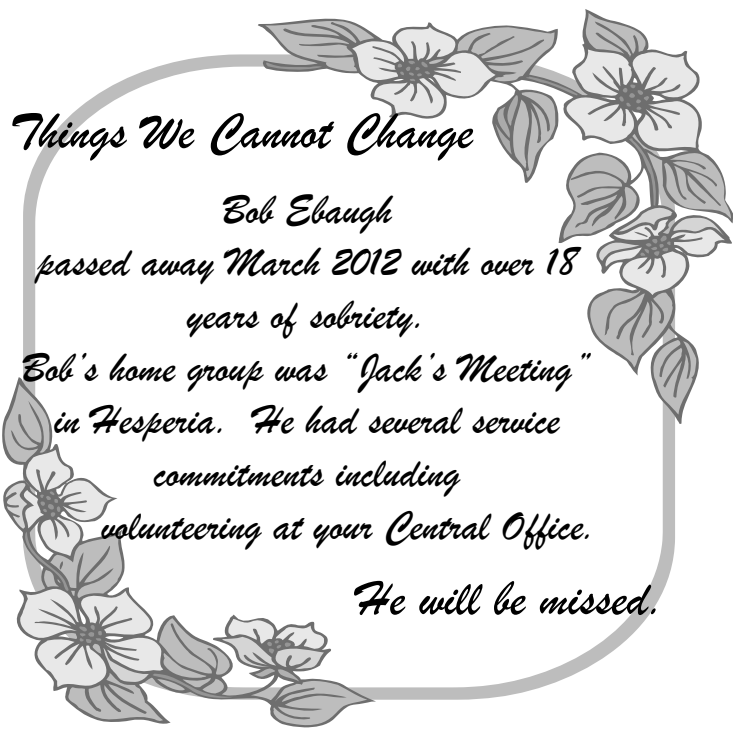
Friday

Bonnie C., a.m.
Don C., p.m.

Your Intergroup Board of
Directors

Central Office Activities

	<u>MARCH</u>	<u>Y.T.D.</u>
Visitors	96	275
Info. Calls	223	673
12 Step Calls	1	5
<u>Call Forwarding</u>		
Info. Calls	167	529
12 Step Calls	1	9
<u>TOTALS</u>		
Info. Calls	390	1,202
12 Step Calls	2	14 ²



Upcoming Events

April 21, 2012

Intergroup meeting, 9:30 a.m. at Central Office. Call 760-242-9292 for information.

April 28, 2012

Funn in Recovery Speaker Meeting and Potluck, Norman Smith Park, Yermo, CA. Potluck/Bar-B-Q starts at 3:00 p.m. with the Speaker Meeting to follow. For more information and directions call Larry S. at 760-254-2307.

May 19, 2012

9th Annual Women's A.A. Banquet. Quality Inn and Suites - Green Tree in Victorville. Call either Wendi at 760-881-7255 or Melissa at 760-217-9330 for more information.

And Finally ...

