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I'm off to a Good Start!

The article in last month's newsletter titled "Anonymity" was submitted by Kathy F., of Hesperia and not by Kathy G., of Hesperia. I apologize for any unwanted notoriety this may have caused. Betty B., Editor

"Children of Chaos": The Birth of A.A.'s Traditions

"Moocher mooched, lonely hearts pined, committees quarreled, new clubs has unheard-of headaches, orators held forth, groups split wide open, members turned professional, sometimes whole groups got drunk, and local public relations went haywire." (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 149)

Such, according to A.A. co-founder Bill W., was the state of affairs in many of the Fellowship's fledgling groups during A.A.'s pioneering time. With little or no experience to speak of in the harrowing new adventure of sobriety, A.A. groups were flying blind.

Like wildfire, A.A.'s program of recovery, principally contained in the Twelve Steps as outlined in the Big Book, was spreading from one alcoholic to another, crisscrossing the nation and even jumping to foreign lands with alarming speed and facility. Helped by high profile media accounts and the growing support of medicine and religion, A.A. was well on its way to becoming a household name. People were getting sober and the good news traveled fast.

Nevertheless, A.A.'s collection of burgeoning groups often had little to hold onto beyond the deep desire of their members for individual sobriety. Everything was being defined on a day-to-day, person-to-person basis, with trial and error discovery of what worked and what didn't. Rules were made and broken; policies were introduced and soon discarded; and, inevitable, powerful, sometimes bitter disputes broke out regarding the relations of A.A. members one to another and to the outside world.

Problems were many in A.A.'s first decade,

and while membership climbed higher and higher with each year, the challenges of living and working together not only as individuals but as groups began to pile up. With success and exposure, also came suspicion, jealousy, and resentment. There was conflict over every conceivable issue: the use of money, the operation of clubhouses, misuse of A.A.'s name, leadership and personal romances. Meeting rituals varied from one group to another; some meetings aimed at low-bottom drunks, some featured those of the high-bottom variety; some allowed "slippers" to return to the fold, others thought they should be excommunicated.

As Bill recounted in *A.A. Comes of Age* (p.203), "It seemed as if every contestant in every group argument wrote us during this confused and exiting period." The problems articulated by these A.A. members threatened to overwhelm the nascent Fellowship, and Bill confessed in a 1950 letter to an A.A. member in Michigan, "When letters describing the growing pains of the early groups coma across my desk. . . I used to lie awake nights. It seemed certain that the forces of disintegration would tear our pioneering groups apart. . ."

A.A. was not the first organization, however, to find itself foundering on the reefs of conflict and perilous success. The Washingtonian Society, a movement for the reclamation of drunkards a century earlier, had nearly discovered an answer to alcoholism. At the outset, the society, which originated in Baltimore, was composed entirely of alcoholics trying to help one another. They had notable success and the movement thrived. Their membership

passed the five hundred thousand mark. Yet, the Washingtonians permitted politicians and reformers, both alcoholic and nonalcoholic, to use the society for their own purposes and, in spite of their stated aims to avoid politics, religion and commercialization, many members took opposing sides publicly on questions of alcohol reform and other issues of the day. Within eight or nine years it was reported that the Washingtonians "had lost their thunder." Said Bill W. at an annual A.A. banquet in New York City on November 7, 1945, "In short, the Washingtonians went out to settle the world's affairs before they had learned to manage themselves. They had no capacity for minding their own business."

The Oxford Group, a religious organization from which the seeds of A.A. grew and which supplied some of the Fellowship's basic spiritual principles and precepts, also provided an example of what not to do. In *A.A. Comes of Age*, (p. 39), Bill wrote: "Early A.A. got its ideas of self-examination, acknowledgement of character defects, restitution for harm done, and working with others straight from the Oxford Groups and directly from Sam Shoemaker, their former leader in America." However, while Oxford Group members were deeply interested in the plight of alcoholics, some of their practices made Bill and others uncomfortable. Serving as a spiritual springboard for many of A.A.'s fundamental concepts, the differences between the Oxford Group and the fledgling Fellowship ultimately prompted a separation to the two groups. As Bill once put it, "The Oxford Group wanted to save the world, and I only wanted to save drunks."

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Utilizing the example of the groups that had come before and the growing body of experience from its own internal struggles in the Fellowship's first decade, A.A. inched closer to a set of working principles that could guide and protect the group life of A.A.

In 1946, in the A.A. Grapevine, these principles were codified by the founders and early members as the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous and were published under the title "Twelve Points to Assure Our Future." They were accepted and endorsed by the membership as a whole at the International Convention of A.A., in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1950. Later, in April of 1953, the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* was published, providing for the Fellowship a blueprint for individual recovery and a roadmap for how to survive as an organization.

"Children of chaos," wrote Bill in Tradition Four, "we have defiantly played with every brand of fire, only to emerge unharmed and, we think, wiser. These very deviations created a vast process of trial and error which, under the grace of God, has brought us to where we stand today."

According to Bill, the reception of the Traditions in the late 1940s was underwhelming. "Only groups in dire trouble took them seriously," he said retrospectively in the June 1955 Grapevine, and "from some quarters there was a violent reaction, especially from groups that had long lists of 'protective' rules and regulations. There was much apathetic indifference."

But time presently changes all that and just a few years later at the 1950 Cleveland Convention, several thousand A.A. members declared the A.A.'s Traditions constituted "the platform upon which our Fellowship could best function and hold together in unity for all time to come." They say that "the Twelve Traditions were going to be as necessary to the life of our Society as the Twelve Steps were to the life of each member. The A.A. Traditions were, the Cleveland Convention thought, the key to the unity, the function, and even the survival of us all."

Echoing that thought, J.B., a member from Modesto, California, noted in the April 1984 Grapevine, "The Twelve Traditions are not a bunch of guidelines set up by 'them' and handed down to us with the directive 'This is what you are going to do, or else.' The Traditions are the result of mistakes that almost tore our Fellowship apart, and we voluntarily accept them.

"When speaking of the Traditions, we are speaking of life or death. I cannot live without A.A. You cannot live without A.A. Yet, you and I are A.A. In spite of ourselves, we have to be responsible for ourselves. In spite of myself, I have to be responsible, and responsibility is what the Traditions are about."

"When I read about the evils of drinking, I gave up reading."
~ Henny Youngman

WARNING: The consumption of alcohol may lead you to think people are laughing *with* you.



Things We Cannot Change

*Thomasita Rudd of Victorville, CA,
passed away with over 37 years of
sobriety on February 3, 2012.*

*She was an active member of the
Jumbleweed Group and sponsored many
women in the High Desert.*

She will be missed.

What is Alcoholics Anonymous?

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship, designed and administered by a bunch of ex drunks, whose only qualification for membership is that they can't hold their liquor and do not want to learn how!

It has no rules or fees; no nothing any sensible organization seems to require.

At meetings the speaker starts on one subject, winds up talking about something entirely different and concludes by saying he doesn't know anything about the program, except it works.

The groups are always broke, yet always have money to carry on. They are always losing members but seem to grow. They claim A.A. is a selfish program, but always seem to be doing something for others.

Every group passes laws, rules edicts and pronouncements that everyone blithely ignores. Members who disagree with anything are privileged to walk out in a huff, quitting forever, only to return as if nothing had happened and be greeted accordingly.

Nothing is ever planned more than 24 hours ahead, yet great projects are born and survive magnificently. Nothing A.A. is ever according to Hoyle. How can it survive?

Perhaps it is because we have learned to live and laugh at

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A.A.'s Big Book and 12X12 Now Available in eBook Format

December 9, 2011 (NEW YORK) – Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (A.A.W.S.) is pleased to announce that our two central texts describing the A.A. program of action for recovery from alcoholism are now available in eBook format in English, French, and Spanish.

Publication in this digital media format will give broader distribution and access to A.A.'s basic textbook, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, known popularly as the Big Book, which has helped millions of men and women throughout the world, and in all walks of life, find a new and satisfying way of life without alcohol.

The current, official publisher's version of the Big Book (Fourth Edition), along with *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, can be purchased for \$6 each from the A.A.W.S. Online Store for access on iPhones and iPads. The A.A. eReader App can be downloaded for free from the Apple App store. In the near future, the books will also be available for the various Android platforms.

A.A. members, many of whom read, re-read and quote from the literature at A.A. meetings as part of their recovery, will be able to search for specific passages quickly and highlight key words and sentences in the highly portable format. Also, because the font size and type can be changed, these eBooks will be more universally accessible to those members needing larger print.

Alcoholics Anonymous was first published in 1939, when the "Fellowship" of A.A. was four years old and had a membership of about one hundred. It was written by co-founder Bill W., with each chapter being thoroughly edited and vetted by early A.A. members in Akron, Ohio, and New York City. The second edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous* appeared in 1955, when A.A. membership had grown to about 146,000 in 50 countries. Two further editions followed, in 1976 and 2001.

In 1975, the Big Book sold its one-millionth copy in the English language. That copy was presented to then President Richard Nixon. In 2005, the twenty-five millionth copy was presented to the Warden of San Quentin Prison, where the first A.A. prison group was held. In 2010, the thirty-millionth copy was presented to the American Medical Association, which declared alcoholism and illness in 1956.

First published in April 1953, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* was written by Bill W., with the benefit of hindsight and experience, to offer an explicit view of the principles by which A.A. members recover and by which their Fellowship functions.

Today, more than one million copies of the Big Book are distributed every year in the English language alone (it is translated into 64 languages), and A.A. membership has grown to approximately two million with a presence in more than 180 countries.

To download the free A.A. eReader App, go to the Apple App Store. To purchase these two A.A. copyrighted eBooks, go to the A.A.W.S. Online Store at www.aa.org.

March—April Speakers

Church of the Nazarene
8518 Maple Ave.
Hesperia, CA

MARCH

3rd

Paul E., Lancaster

10th

A.A. CONVENTION

17th

Terry C., Lancaster

24th

Trish and Joe, Glendora

31st

Don B., San Dimas

APRIL

4th

Ruth P., Ontario

14th

Woody & Meredith,
Banning

21st

Mark C., Lancaster

28th

Frank H., Diamond Bar

What is A.A.

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ourselves.

God made humans; God made laughter too. Perhaps God is pleased with our disorganized efforts and makes things turn out right no matter who pushes the wrong button. Maybe God is pleased not with our perfection but with our sincerity. Perhaps God is pleased because we are trying to be nobody but ourselves. We do not know how it works, but it does, and members keep receiving their dividend checks from their A.A. investment.

Remember always:

1. It is good to be sober, and it is easier to stay sober than to get sober!
2. The program of Alcoholics Anonymous was founded by the needy!
3. Today it is practiced by the greedy!

George R.

Submitted by,
Bill P., Victorville, CA

A drunk can usually tell what kind of a time he's having at a party by the look on his wife's face.

To follow the letter of the law is not enough. You can be moral without difficulty in "solitary."

Do not let your morality be simply restraining and abstaining. Be constructive in your goodness. Be good for something.

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We must work out our spiritual development in our own way and according to our conception of the God of our understanding.

Our success or failure will be determined by the honesty of our efforts and the fidelity with which we practice our convictions.

Via, *The Eye Opener*

### H & I Donations November/December 2010

|                       |        |
|-----------------------|--------|
| Sunday Night Campfire | 184.28 |
| Primary Purpose       | 57.63  |
| The Place             | 78.26  |
| T.G.I.F.              | 90.50  |
| Barstow Desert Group  | 110.00 |

### Central Office Activities

|                        | <u>JANUARY</u> | <u>Y.T.D.</u> |
|------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Visitors               | 94             | 94            |
| Info. Calls            | 259            | 259           |
| 12 Step Calls          | 3              | 3             |
| <u>Call Forwarding</u> |                |               |
| Info. Calls            | 197            | 197           |
| 12 Step Calls          | 7              | 7             |
| <u>TOTALS</u>          |                |               |
| Info. Calls            | 456            | 456           |
| 12 Step Calls          | 10             | 10            |

### Upcoming Events

**February 18, 2012**

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

**March 9—11, 2012**

**28<sup>th</sup> Annual A.A. Convention, Ambassador Hotel in Victorville, CA. For information and to register visit [www.highdesertconvention.com](http://www.highdesertconvention.com), or call Jeff L. at 760-596-8846 or Glen P. at 760-697-1567. For Alanon information call Kathryn B. at 760-524-2804.**

**March 24, 2012**

**Ride for Recovery – For information and flyers visit Central Office or [www.victorvalleyaa.org](http://www.victorvalleyaa.org).**

*The only thing potentially worse than not being able to see the forest for the trees is not being able to see the trees because of the forest.*

*~Anonymous*

Submitted by,  
Julie D., Apple Valley, CA

### And Finally . . .

