THE CO-FOUNDERS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES
THEIR LAST MAJOR TALKS

service

Alcoholics Anonymous® is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

• The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

• A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

• Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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The Co-Founders of Alcoholics Anonymous

Biographical sketches
Their last major talks

Dr. Bob

"Simplicity, devotion, steadfastness, and loyalty; these were the hallmarks of Dr. Bob's character which he has well implanted in so many of us."

Bill

ROBERT HOLBROOK SMITH, M.D.
1879-1950

Dr. Bob was born August 8, 1879, in St. Johnsbury, Vt., the only son of Judge and Mrs. W.P. Smith, who were prominent in civic and social activities of that city. Though often rebellious against the strict authority of his parents, "Rob," as his schoolmates called him, was willing to work hard to attain whatever he sincerely wanted; by the time he was nine, he knew he wanted to be a physician.

In his teens, he spent parts of his summers working on a Vermont farm and in an Adirondack summer hotel. Despite his dislike of school, he was a good student and graduated from St. Johnsbury Academy in 1898.

He spent four years at Dartmouth College, graduating in 1902. It was during these school years that drinking became a major activity, though in those days he was never involved in serious trouble because of it.

Three years later, having worked at various jobs in Boston and Montreal, he entered the University of Michigan as a premed student. Here, the pace of his drinking accelerated, and in his sophomore year he left school temporarily, feeling he couldn't complete his course. But he returned, took his exams, and passed them. In 1910, after further training at Rush Memorial College in Chicago, he received his medical degree and secured an internship in City Hospital, Akron, Ohio. Completing his internship in 1912, he opened an office in the Second National Bank Building in Akron, remaining there until his retirement in 1948.

In 1915, he married Anne Ripley, whom he had met while attending St. Johnsbury Academy. As time went on, his alcoholism progressed steadily, yet he was able to function, and few of his colleagues knew how serious his illness was.

Besides being an active member of the City Hospital staff in Akron, he often visited St. Thomas Hospital, also in Akron, where, in 1928, he met Sister Ignatia for the first time. Later, in 1934, he became associated with St. Thomas and in 1943, became a member of the active staff.

In the early thirties, Dr. Bob, in desperate search for an answer to his problem, began to attend meetings of the Oxford Group, feeling he could benefit from its philosophy and other spiritual teachings. Though he continued to drink, he maintained his activity in the group, due in large part to Anne's deep interest.

In May 1935, a meeting with another alcoholic, Bill Wilson, led to his own permanent sobriety and to the formation of the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is estimated that Dr. Bob, with the help of Sister Ignatia, guided some 5,000 fellow alcoholics to recovery during his 15 years of loving ministry to them.

What manner of man was Dr. Bob? According to his son: "He had tremendous drive, great physical stamina. He was reserved and formal on first acquaintance, but as you came to know him, he was just the opposite: friendly, generous, full of fun — he loved a good joke. Regarding A.A., he tried to make every decision in the best interests of the group, to the exclusion of any personal advantage. He never ceased to be surprised that so many people sought him out, but felt he had only been God's agent and so was not due any personal credit."

Bob and Anne lived simply; if he had any pride of possession, it was for cars. He played bridge expertly, always playing to win! An avid reader, he read for at least an hour each night of his adult life, "drunk or sober." He was a fight fan, succumbing finally to television so he could watch the fights.

He held three concepts in particularly high regard. One was simplicity — in his own life-style and in practicing the A.A. way of life. Second, he believed in tolerance of other people's ideas, in speaking out "with kindness and consideration for others," and in "guarding that erring member, the tongue." Third, he believed that one's job in A.A. was to "get sober and stay sober" and "never to be so complacent that we're not willing to extend that help to our less fortunate brothers."

Dr. Bob firmly believed that "love and service" are the cornerstones of Alcoholics Anonymous. He died of cancer at City Hospital, Akron, November 16, 1950.

This is Dr. Bob's last major talk, as transcribed from a recording made at Detroit, Mich., in December 1948. It was printed for the first time in the June 1973 issue of the Grapevine and is reprinted here with the permission of The A.A. Grapevine, Inc.

In the summer of 1948, Dr. Bob had been stricken by the malady that was to take him from us. In 1950, he was able to marshal his strength for a brief appearance at the First International Convention in Cleveland, Ohio. There, he stressed the simplicity of our program, pleading, "Lets not louse it all up with Freudian complexes and things that are interesting to the scientific mind," but have little to do with our actual A.A. work. The same theme appears in this longer talk.

ALTHOUGH a good many of you have heard or have read about the inception of A.A., probably there are some who haven't. From that brief story, there are things to be learned. So, even at the risk of repetition, I would like to relate exactly what did happen in those early days.

You recall the story about Bill having had a spiritual experience and having been sold on the idea of attempting to be helpful to other drunks.

Time went by, and he had not created a single convert, not one. As we express it, no one had jelled. He worked tirelessly, with no thought of saving his own strength or time, but nothing seemed to register.

When he came out to Akron on a business mission, which (perhaps for the good of all of us) turned out to be quite a flop, he was tempted to drink. He paced up and down the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel, wondering whether he had better buy two fifths of gin and be "king for a night," as he expressed it, or whether he had better not. His teachings led him to believe that he possibly might avoid difficulties if he found another alcoholic on whom to work.

Spying the name of our good friend the Reverend Walter Tunks on the bulletin board in the lobby of the Mayflower, Bill called him up and asked him for the name of some local member of the Oxford Group, people with whom he had affiliated and through whose instrumentality he had acquired sobriety. Dr. Tunks said he wasn't one himself, but he knew quite a number and gave Bill a little list of about nine or ten.

Bill started to call them up, without very much success. They had either just left town or were leaving town or having a party or had a sore toe or something. Anyway, Bill came down very near to the end, and his eyes happened to light on the name of Mrs. Seiberling — our good friend Henrietta. He called Henry and told her what he wanted, and she said, "Come right out and have lunch with me." At lunch, he went into his story in considerable detail, and she said, "I have just the man for you."

She rushed to the phone and called Anne and told her that she had just the fellow to be helpful to me, and that we should come right over. Anne said, "Well, I guess we better not go over today."

But Henry is very persistent, a very determined individual. She said, "Oh yes, come on over. I *know* he'll be helpful to Bob." Anne still didn't think it very wise that we go over that day. Finally, Henry bore in to such an extent that Anne had to

tell her I was very bagged and had passed all capability of listening to any conversation, and the visit would just have to be postponed. So Henry started in about the next day being Sunday and Mother's Day, and Anne said we would be over then.

I don't remember ever feeling much worse, but I was very fond of Henry, and Anne had said we would go over. So we started over. On the way, I extracted a solemn promise from Anne that 15 minutes of this stuff would be tops. I didn't want to talk to this mug or anybody else, and we'd really make it snappy, I said. Now these are the actual facts: We got there at five o'clock, and it was 11:15 when we left.

Possibly, your memories are good enough to carry you back to certain times when you haven't felt too good. You wouldn't have listened to anybody unless he really had something to tell you. I recognized the fact that Bill *did* have something, so I listened those many hours, and I stopped drinking immediately.

Very shortly after that, there was a medical meeting in Atlantic City, and I developed a terrific thirst for knowledge. I had to have knowledge, I said, so I would go to Atlantic City and absorb lots of knowledge. I had incidentally acquired a thirst for Scotch, but I didn't mention that. I went to Atlantic City and really hung one on. When I came to, I was in the home of a friend of ours in Cuyahoga Falls, one of the suburbs of Akron. Bill came over and got me home and gave me a hooker or two of Scotch that night and a bottle of beer the next morning, and that was on the 10th of June, 1935, and I have had no alcohol, in any form that I know of, since.

Now the interesting part of all this is not the sordid details, but the situation that we two fellows were in. We had both been associated with the Oxford Group, Bill in New York, for five months, and I in Akron, for two and a half years. Bill had acquired their idea of service. I had not, but I had done an immense amount of reading they had recommended. I had refreshed my

memory of the Good Book, and I had had excellent training in that as a youngster. They told me I should go to their meetings regularly, and I did, every week. They said that I should affiliate myself with some church, and we did that. They also said I should cultivate the habit of prayer, and I did that — at least, to a considerable extent for me. But I got tight every night, and I mean that. It wasn't once in a while — it was practically every night.

I couldn't understand what was wrong. I had done all the things that those good people told me to do. I had done them, I thought, very faithfully and sincerely. And I still continued to overindulge. But the one thing that they hadn't told me was the one thing that Bill did that Sunday — attempt to be helpful to somebody else.

We immediately started to look around for prospects, and it wasn't long before one appeared, in the form of a man whom a great many of you know — Bill D., our good friend from Akron. Now I knew that this Bill was a Sunday-school superintendent, and I thought that he probably forgot more about the Good Book every night than I ever knew. Who was I to try to tell him about it? It made me feel somewhat hypocritical. Anyway, we did talk, and I'm glad to say the conversation fell on fertile ground.

Then we had three prospects dumped in our laps almost simultaneously. In my mind, the spirit of service was of prime importance, but I found that it had to be backed up with some knowledge on our subject. I used to go to the hospital and stand there and talk. I talked many a time to a chap in the bed for five or six hours. I don't know how he ever stood me for five or six hours, but he did. We must have hidden his clothes. Anyway, it came to me that I probably didn't know too much about what I was saying. We are stewards of what we have, and that includes our time. I was not giving a good account of my stewardship of time when it took me six hours to say something to this man that I could have said in an hour — *if* I had known what I was talking about. I certainly was not a very efficient individual.

I'm somewhat allergic to work, but I felt that I should continue to increase my familiarity with the Good Book and also should read a good deal of standard literature, possibly of a scientific nature. So I did cultivate the habit of reading. I think I'm not exaggerating when I say I have probably averaged an hour a day for the last 15 years. (I'm not trying to sell you on the idea that you've got to read an hour a day. There are plenty of people, fine A.A. s, who don't read very much.)

You see, back in those days we were groping in the dark. We knew practically nothing of alcoholism. I, a physician, knew nothing about it to speak of. Oh, I read about it, but there wasn't anything worth reading in any of the text-books. Usually the information consisted of some queer treatment for D.T.s, if a patient had gone that far. If he hadn't, you prescribed a few bromides and gave the fellow a good lecture.

In early A.A. days, we became quite convinced that the spiritual program was fine if we could help the Lord out a little with some supplementary diet. Bill D., having a lot of stomach trouble, had stumbled across the fact that he began feeling much better on sauerkraut and cold tomatoes. We thought Bill should share that experience. Of course, we discovered later that dietary restrictions had very little to do with maintaining sobriety.

At that point, our stories didn't amount to anything to speak of. When we started in on Bill D., we had no Twelve Steps, either; we had no Traditions.

But we were convinced that the answer to our problems was in the Good Book. To some of us older ones, the parts that we found absolutely essential were the Sermon on the Mount, the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, and the Book of James.

We used to have daily meetings at a friend's house. All this happened at a time when everybody was broke, awfully broke. It was probably much easier for us to be successful when broke than it would have been if we'd had a checking account apiece. We were, every one of us, so

painfully broke that . . . well, it isn't a pleasant thought. Nothing could be done about it. But I think now that it was providentially arranged.

Until 1940, or maybe early in 1941, we held the Akron meetings at the residence of that good friend, who allowed us to bang up the plaster and the doorjambs, carting chairs up and downstairs. And he had a very beautiful home. Then we outgrew that, so we rented the auditorium in King School, and the group I attend personally has been there ever since. We attempt to have good meetings, and I think we're usually successful.

It wasn't until 1938 that the teachings and efforts and studies that had been going on were crystallized in the form of the Twelve Steps. I didn't write the Twelve Steps. I had nothing to do with the writing of them. But I think I probably had something to do with them indirectly. After my June 10th episode, Bill came to live at our house and stayed for about three months. There was hardly a night that we didn't sit up until two or three o'clock, talking. It would be hard for me to conceive that, during these nightly discussions around our kitchen table, nothing was said that influenced the writing of the Twelve Steps. We already had the basic ideas, though not in terse and tangible form. We got them, as I said, as a result of our study of the Good Book. We *must* have had them. Since then, we have learned from experience that they are very important in maintaining sobriety. We *were* maintaining sobriety — therefore, we must have had them.

Well, that was the way things got started in Akron. As we grew, we began to get offshoots, one in Cleveland, then another one in Akron, and all have been continuing ever since. It is a great source of satisfaction to me to feel that I may have kicked in my two bits' worth toward getting this thing started. Maybe I'm taking too much for granted. I don't know. But I feel that I was simply used as God's agent. I feel that I'm no different from any of you fellows or girls, except that I was a little more fortunate. I got this message thirteen and a half years ago, while some of you had to wait till later.

I used to get a little peeved at our Heavenly Father, because He had been a little slow on the trigger in my own case. I thought I would have been ready to receive the message quite a while before He got around to presenting it. And that used to irritate me no end. After all, maybe He knows better than I. But I felt sure that I would have been glad to have *anything* presented to produce the sobriety that I thought I wanted so badly. I even used to doubt that at times. I would go to my good friend Henry and say, "Henry, do you think I want to stop drinking liquor?"

She, being a very charitable soul, would say, "Yes, Bob, I'm sure you want to stop."

I would say, "Well, I can't conceive of any living human who really wanted to do something as badly as I think I do, who could be such a total failure. Henry, I think I'm just one of those *want-to-want-to* guys."

And she'd say, "No, Bob, I think you want to. You just haven't found a way to work it yet."

The fact that my sobriety has been maintained continuously for 13½ years doesn't allow me to think that I am necessarily any further away from my next drink than any of you people. I'm still very human, and I still think a double Scotch would taste awfully good. If it wouldn't produce disastrous results, I might try it. I don't know. I have no reason to think that it would taste any different — but I have no legitimate reason to believe that the results would be any different, either. They were always the same. I always wound up back of the dear old eight ball. I just don't want to pay the bill, because that's a big bill. It always was, and I think it would be even larger today because of what has gone on in the past 13 years. Being a bit out of practice, I don't believe I'd last very long. I'm having an awfully nice time, and I don't want to bump myself off, even with the "pleasures" of the alcohol route. No, I'm not going to do it, and I'm never going to as long as I do the things I'm supposed to, and I know what these things are. So, if I should ever get tight, I certainly would have no one but myself to blame for it.

Perhaps it would not be done with malice aforethought, but it would certainly be done as a result of extreme carelessness and indifference.

I said I was quite human, and I get to thinking every once in a while that this guy Bob is rather a smart individual. He's got this liquor situation right by the tail — proved it and demonstrated it — hasn't had a drink for over 13 years. Probably could knock off a couple, and no one would be the wiser. I tell you, I'm not trying to be funny. Those thoughts actually do enter my mind. And the minute they do, I know exactly what has happened.

You see, in Akron we have the extreme good fortune to have a very nice setup at St. Thomas Hospital. The ward theoretically accommodates seven alcoholics, but the good Sister Ignatia sees that it's stretched a little bit. She usually has two or more others parked around somewhere. Just as soon as that idea that I could probably polish off a couple enters my mind, I think "Oh-oh. How about the boys in the ward? You've been giving them the semi-brush-off for the last few days. You'd better get back on the job, big boy, before you get into trouble." And I patter right back and am much more attentive than I had been before I got the funny idea. But I do get it every once in a while, and I'll probably go on getting it whenever I get careless about seeing the boys in the ward.

Any time I neglected them, I was thinking more of Bob than I was of the ward. I wasn't being especially loving. Those fellows had come there indicating their desire for help, and I was just a little too busy to give them much of my time, as if they had been panhandling on the street. Don't want to be bothered with the fellow? Ten cents to get rid of him — why, that's easy! He could even stand two bits — not because you love the fellow, but just to be relieved of the nuisance of his hanging on your coat sleeve. No unselfishness, no love at all indicated in that transaction.

I think the kind of service that really counts is giving of yourself, and that almost invariably requires effort and time. It isn't a matter of just putting a little quiet money in the dish. That's

needed, but it isn't giving much for the average individual in days like these, when most people get along fairly well. I don't believe that type of giving would ever keep anyone sober. But giving of our own effort and strength and time is quite a different matter. And I think that is what Bill learned in New York and I didn't learn in Akron until we met.

The four absolutes, as we called them, were the only yardsticks we had in the early days, before the Steps. I think the absolutes still hold good and can be extremely helpful. I have found at times that a question arises, and I want to do the right thing, but the answer is not obvious. Amost always, if I measure my decision carefully by the yardsticks of absolute honesty, absolute unselfishness, absolute purity, and absolute love, and it checks up pretty well with those four, then my answer can't be very far out of the way. If, however, I do that and I'm still not too satisfied with the answer, I usually consult with some friend whose judgment, in this particular case, would be very much better than mine. But usually the absolutes can help you to reach your own personal decision without bothering your friends.

Suppose we have trouble taking the First Step; we can't get quite honest enough to admit that John Barleycorn really has bested us. The lack of absolute purity is involved here — purity of ideas, purity of motives. Absolute unselfishness includes the kind of service I have been talking about — not the dime or two bits to the bum, but actually giving of yourself.

As you well know, absolute love incorporates all else. It's very difficult to have absolute love. I don't think any of us will ever get it, but that doesn't mean we can't *try* to get it. It was extremely difficult for me to love my fellowman. I didn't dislike him, but I didn't love him, either. Unless there was some special reason for caring, I was just indifferent to him. I would be willing to give him a little bit *if* it didn't require much effort. I never would injure him at all. But love him? For a long time, I just couldn't do it.

I think I overcame this problem to some extent when I was forced to do it, because I had to either love this fellow or attempt to be helpful to him, or I would probably get drunk again. Well, you could say that was just a manifestation of selfishness, and you'd be quite correct. I was selfish to the extent of not wanting Bob hurt; so, to keep from getting Bob hurt, I would go through the motions of trying to be helpful to the other fellow. Debate it any way you want to, but the fact remains that the average individual can never acquire absolute love. I suspect there are a few people who do; I think maybe I know some who come pretty close to it. But I could count them on the fingers of one hand. I don't say that in any disparaging manner; I have some wonderful friends. But I'm talking about the final aspects of absolute love, particularly as it applies to A.A.

I don't think we can do anything very well in this world unless we practice it. And I don't believe we do A.A. too well unless we practice it. The fellows who win great world awards in athletic events are people who practice, have been practicing for years, and still have to practice. To do a good job in A.A., there are a number of things we should practice. We should practice, as I've said, acquiring the spirit of service. We should attempt to acquire some faith, which isn't easily done, especially for the person who has always been very materialistic, following the standards of society today. But I think faith can be acquired; it can be acquired slowly; it has to be cultivated. That was not easy for me, and I assume that it is difficult for everyone else.

Another thing that was difficult for me (and I probably don't do it too well yet) was the matter of tolerance. We are all inclined to have closed minds, pretty tightly closed. That's one reason why some people find our spiritual teaching difficult. They don't *want* to find out too much about it, for various personal reasons, like the fear of being considered effeminate. But it's quite important that we do acquire tolerance toward the other fellow's ideas. I think I have more of it than I did have, although not

enough yet. If somebody crosses me, I'm apt to make a rather caustic remark. I've done that many times, much to my regret. And then, later on, I find that the man knew much more about it than I did. I'd have been infinitely better off if I'd just kept my big mouth shut.

Another thing with which most of us are not too blessed is the feeling of humility. I don't mean the fake humility of Dickens' Uriah Heep. I don't mean the doormat variety; we are not called upon to be shoved around and stepped on by anyone; we have a right to stand up for our rights. I'm talking about the attitude of each and every one of us toward our Heavenly Father. Christ said, "Of Myself, I am nothing — My strength cometh from My Father in heaven." If He had to say that, how about you and me? Did you say it? Did I say it? No. That's exactly what we didn't say. We were inclined to say instead, "Look me over, boys. Pretty good, huh?" We had no humility, no sense of having received anything through the grace of our Heavenly Father.

I don't believe I have any right to get cocky about getting sober. It's only through God's grace that I did it. I can feel very thankful that I was privileged to do it. I may have contributed some activity to help, but basically, it was only through His kindness. If my strength does come from Him, who am I to get cocky about it? I should have a very, very humble attitude toward the source of my strength; I should never cease to be grateful for whatever blessings come my way. And I *have* been blessed in very large measure.

You know, as far as everybody's ultimate aim is concerned, it doesn't make much difference whether we're drinking or whether we're sober. Either way, we're all after the same thing, and that's happiness. We want peace of mind. The trouble with us alcoholics was this: We demanded that the world give us happiness and peace of mind in just the particular way we wanted to get it — by the alcohol route. And we weren't successful. But when we take time to find out some of the spiritual laws, and familiarize ourselves with them,

and put them into practice, then we do get happiness and peace of mind. I feel extremely fortunate and thankful that our Heavenly Father has let me enjoy them. Anyone can get them who wishes to. There seem to be some rules that we have to follow, but happiness and peace of mind are always here, open and free to anyone. And that is the message we can give to our fellow alcoholics.

We know what A.A. has done in the past 13 years, but where do we go from here? Our membership at present is, I believe, conservatively estimated at 70,000.* Will it increase from here on? Well, that will depend on every member of A.A. It is possible for us to grow or not to grow, as we elect. If we fight shy of entangling alliances, if we avoid getting messed up with controversial issues (religious or political or wet-dry), if we maintain unity through our central offices, if we preserve the simplicity of our program, if we remember that our job is to get sober and to stay sober and to help our less fortunate brother to do the same thing, then we shall continue to grow and thrive and prosper.

More detailed biographical material on the cofounders of A.A. may be found in the books Alcoholics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers, and "Pass It On" The Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World, and in two memorial issues of the A.A. Grapevine — Dr. Bob's in January 1951, Bill W.'s in March 1971.

**Now 75 years old, A.A. has a worldwide membership estimated at over 2,000,000.*

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.*

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

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

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11. 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.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Bill W.

". . . It was five years ago I first met you, Bill . . . I shall never forget, nor cease to be grateful."

Dr. Bob (1940)

WILLIAM GRIFFITH WILSON
1895-1971

Bill was born in East Dorset, Vt., November 26, 1895, the only son of Emily and Gilman Barrows Wilson. His elementary education began in a two-room schoolhouse in East Dorset, then continued in Rutland, where his father took over the operation of a marble quarry. He next attended Burr and Burton Seminary in Manchester and Arlington (Mass.) High School.

In 1914, he entered Norwich University, a military college in Vermont, and completed three years of an electrical engineering course. Further education was forestalled at this point by the outbreak of World War I. After military training, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Army and saw service in France with the 66th Artillery Corps. It was during this period of military service that he started to drink, with disastrous results almost at once.

Bill married Lois Burnham of Brooklyn, N.Y., on January 24, 1918, shortly before leaving for active duty.

Returning home after the Armistice, he worked briefly in the insurance department of the New York Central Railroad. From 1921 to 1925, he was an investigator for the U.S. Fidelity & Guaranty Company, in New York City, and completed a three-year night law course at the Brooklyn Law School.

In 1925, he became a field investigator for various groups with financial interests. His field reports on industrial properties and their managements were the basis for heavy investment and speculative commitments, in which he was often given an interest.

By 1931, however, his drinking had become a serious problem. Despite Lois's efforts and the many promises and pledges to stop drinking made to her and business associates, the compulsion to drink was too strong. Over the next three years, what had promised to be a brilliant Wall Street career rapidly deteriorated.

In November 1934, he learned from an old friend, Ebby, how the Oxford Group was able sometimes to help alcoholics; Ebby himself was a recent example. In Towns Hospital a month later, reflecting upon Ebby's message and in total despair, he cried out for help. Bill has described what then occurred as an overwhelming and awesome spiritual experience, carrying the conviction of a release from drinking and an insight that in helping other alcoholics he could maintain his own sobriety.

While attending Oxford Group meetings, he tried to sober up many alcoholics over the next six months, without success. In May 1935, a business trip to Akron, Ohio, led to his meeting with Dr. Bob, who became the second successful recovery — and Alcoholics Anonymous was born.

Bill's service to A.A. spanned 36 years, during which, with the help of other oldtimers, he formulated A.A.'s recovery program, codified into a set of Traditions the first ten years of its group experience, wrote four books for the movement, and contributed numerous articles about A.A. to internal and outside publications. He often spoke before medical, psychiatric, and religious societies, and testified (in closed session) before various state and Federal legislative committee hearings on alcoholism. During his lifetime, he declined all public honors, setting an example for the whole Fellowship.

Much of his A.A. life was devoted to building a sound structure for the Fellowship, helping first, in 1938, to establish a board of trustees. Following the writing and publication of *Alcoholics Anonymous* (the Big Book) in 1939, he was concerned with setting up a publishing company and service office for the fledgling movement.

As A.A. grew, he saw the need for calling together a conference of delegates whose function would be to serve as a permanent linkage between the groups and its major service board. This was initiated in 1951. In 1955, when the Conference (U.S. and Canada) structure proved workable after its trial period, he stepped down from active leadership, though maintaining a deep personal interest in seeing to completion certain structural changes he believed to be necessary. The last decade of his life was devoted largely to non-A.A. activities.

All his life, Bill retained, as did Dr. Bob, a deep affection for and identification with the people of Vermont; he and Lois returned there often for spiritual refreshment. An able and amusing storyteller, he enjoyed sharing with friends many delightful anecdotes about his early years.

Bill died of pneumonia in Miami Beach, Fla., on January 24, 1971. It seems fitting that his final resting place lies within the shadow of the Vermont mountain he loved as a child.

The following is an edited transcript of the final part of Bill W.'s last major A.A. talk, transcribed from a recording made October 11, 1969. The occasion was the celebration of the 35th anniversary of Bill's sobriety, with a dinner at the New York Hilton sponsored by the New York Intergroup Association. More than 3,000 A.A.s and their families and friends had gathered to honor Bill. Although he later addressed other groups briefly — including a few words at the A.A. International Convention in Miami in 1970 — this address was to be Bill's last full-length talk at an A.A. meeting.

The first part of the talk concerned the origins and early years of A.A. This segment deals, for the most part, with the development of A.A.'s Twelve Traditions.

THE TWELVE STEPS of A.A. were written in 1938. We soon found that unless we, as individuals, conformed fairly well and voluntarily to our Twelve Steps, as individuals we got drunk. A group shattered, and those individuals who did follow the Steps went out and formed still more groups. So underneath A.A. structure lay the dreadful imperative of John Barleycorn, who, in effect, was promising death or insanity as the price of not conforming. After a while, we began to see that these simple Steps were right because they worked. And finally, in our spiritual development, some of us came to love these principles for themselves and for ourselves.

By 1939, membership in A.A. had reached about 100, and the Big Book was published. By 1940, membership had jumped to about 2,000. And the following year saw the printing of the *Saturday Evening Post* article by Jack Alexander. Jack came and spent a whole month with us, thinking at first he was investigating just another racket. But he found he wasn't, and soon he got the feel of A.A. Jack's work appeared in the Post in March of 1941.

Well, pandemonium broke loose. The post office box number of our little one-room office in New York City was absolutely clobbered with frantic mail: "Where can I reach A.A.? What can I do?" Mail came from families, doctors, and sometimes the drunks themselves. The upshot was that we had to write to all these people — a personal letter to each — no form letters. Meanwhile, we got after our few existing groups and gave them the lists of new prospects in towns all over the United States and Canada. So A.A. was off and running in the years between 1940 and 1945.

Our next great backlash from A.A.'s growth was the terrible troubles that so many of our new groups were having. Working without any experience, they'd been on their own with the Big Book and a call or letter or two from our office. Did they have a time! Everything short of murder happened. Naturally, groups began to write about their troubles to the office in New York, where the one gal who had been helping me was increased to three.

Questions piled up. Could we function solely as individual groups, or in groups organized according to cities, areas, or nations? Could A.A. be spread worldwide? Could we cross barriers of language and culture? Even then, we were to see ambitious A.A.s who wanted to marry us to other enterprises. Others who wanted to sober up drunks became professional therapists, charging so much per session. Still others thought maybe we ought to take up the prohibitionist cudgels — not many, but some.

Up to this time, oldtimers like Dr. Bob and me and others in existing groups pretty much ran things and constituted an acknowledged leadership. But after this uproar got going, we oldtimers began to be taught by the growing movement: what it would stand for and what it wouldn't; what would work and what wouldn't. So, instead of being a teacher for A.A. any more, I, in particular, became a pupil of the Fellowship.

We began to look for the answers to some of these questions. We decided that we needed some kind of publication that would relay, to *all* of these groups what successes many of them had begun to achieve. At first, this stuff was mimeographed. Then it was published in the Grapevine, which was started in 1944.

The Traditions of A.A. were then in the long form. A little later, they were shortened and capsulated. These are the principles by which the A.A. Fellowship lives and which, in my humble judgment, will guarantee its survival, even in this perilous world.

The *First Tradition* has to do with the general welfare, because, God knows, we have learned that our general welfare comes before anything else. As important as the individual is, it *had* to come first, or there could be no individual survival for anybody — that was certain.

Number *Two*. Our membership had come to the conclusion that oldtimers couldn't run things forever. The newer members were going to take their affairs into their own hands, first at the group level, then at the central office level, and

maybe some day at the national level, where the trusteeship we had set up operated in the New York office. There began to be talk about the idea of the "trusted servant." A trusted servant was not a housemaid or a faceless automaton; but he wasn't a boss, either. He was a leader, trusted with discretion, and that was all.

Then — number *Three* — there arose the matter of membership. If you look at an early printing of the Big Book, you'll see that we expressed great concern lest we be flooded with more people than we could take care of.* This was the specter of fear. We were actually afraid that all sorts of so-called undesirable people might show up — not just "pure alcoholics," but people with "complications." What about our reputation? We thought, mistakenly, that we were in a position to pick and choose. Anyway, that part of the book was eliminated after the first printing, because our early experience had brought all sorts of people into A.A., and we discovered that A.A. worked for most of them.

For example, a fellow came to Dr. Bob and said, "I'm an alcoholic; here is my history. But I also have this other 'complication.' Can I join A.A.?" Bob threw it out to all the other deacons, while the poor guy waited.

Finally, there was some kind of hearing on it among the self-appointed elders. I remember how perfectly Bob put it to them. He reminded us that most of us were practicing Christians. Then he asked, "What would the Master have thought? Would He have kept this man away?" He had them cold! The man came in, was a prodigious worker, and was one of our most respected people.

So, out of antecedents like this one, our *Third Tradition* was born: that any person having a drinking problem — if *he* says so — is entitled to join A.A., and nobody can deny him this right. This, indeed, is a great irony — enormous freedom welling up out of grief and slavery to the bottle.

** The foreword to the first edition referred to "the overwhelming number of personal appeals which may result from this publication."*

Group autonomy came next: *Tradition Four.* "Autonomy" is a ten-dollar word, but it means simply that each A.A. group can conduct its affairs any way it pleases. The only thing its members *can't* do is to behave in such a way as to be clearly harmful to other people. But they cannot be compelled to believe anything or pay anything, and they can run their own affairs as they see fit, providing that they do not ally themselves with some other cause. That's autonomy.

I guess it was natural for a lot of people to ask why the A.A. principles couldn't also be applied to a lot of other things. Why shouldn't we get into the business of social reform? Why shouldn't we move into the general field of alcoholism therapy with our know-how? In fact, the original Foundation, now our General Service Board, was chartered to do everything in the world with respect to alcohol except lobby for prohibition.

All of this finally flew out the window when we realized that we could avoid reams of trouble merely by sticking to our primary purpose: to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. This was not our virtue. It grew out of our own individual suffering and our own individual experiences and our own release from this baffling disease, so it *had* to be our primary purpose. That is the fundamental message of our *Fifth Tradition.*

Then there was the question, raised in *Tradition Six,* of relating ourselves to the growing field of alcoholic therapy around us. The debate went on for years. The answer, in a word, was "cooperation" — that is, the effort to help — but not direct A.A. endorsement. We felt that individual A.A.s might want to — and should choose to ally themselves as *citizens* with these enterprises, so that these organizations might benefit from our knowledge and experience, provided that they didn't use the A.A. name publicly to raise money or claim endorsement.

The *Seventh Tradition* of self-support has a long history. Self-support is essentially the concept of mature responsibility. We hoped that we

would grow up in A.A. and stand on our own feet. We *have* shouldered this responsibility; we *are* paying our way; and we steadfastly decline all outside contributions to A.A.

Tradition Eight brings up the question of professionalism, a very serious matter. Might an A.A. member be paid a fee for his services *as an A.A. member?* Almost from the first, this was shouted down. Some of us have become counselors; others run drying-out farms. We have found that this sort of activity works well, as long as it involves some legitimate service that is not straight A.A. work. For instance, I've done lots of A.A. work I have never been paid for, but I *am* paid as an author. The people working over at G.S.O. headquarters are not being paid for face-to-face treatment or therapy, but for using their abilities to carry the message worldwide. That's the primary purpose of all of our services, whether group, local, or national — and now, international, including the World Service Meeting.

Tradition Nine reminds us that there used to be fierce debate about whether A.A. ought to be organized the way most nonprofit corporations are. It was finally resolved that A.A., as such, would never have an organization in the sense of a "government" that could issue directives by committee or board to individuals or groups within the Fellowship. Our committees and boards could only provide services, and we've tried to organize them to function effectively. But A.A. has no government in the political sense. This, again, is no virtue — just simplicity.

Traditions Ten, Eleven, and Twelve are really concerned with anonymity, each in its own way. Our public relations should be characterized by anonymity — by the principle of *attracting* people to us, rather than by press agentry. In fact, it is best to let our friends recommend us. We came to the middle course as the result of friction between two extremes: the radical in A.A. who would ruin it by doing everything, and the conservative who would rot us by doing nothing. Our public relations policy does not publicize people, but centers

on the Fellowship that stands ready to serve. And it is effective, though not by the usual methods.

Anonymity, to my mind, is the spiritual key to all the Traditions. Why is this so? Our book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* explains:

". . . Anonymity is real humility at work. It is an all-pervading spiritual quality which today keynotes A.A. life everywhere. Moved by the spirit of anonymity, we try to give up our natural desires for personal distinction as A.A. members both among fellow alcoholics and before the general public. As we lay aside these very human aspirations, we believe that each of us takes part in the weaving of a protective mantle which covers our whole Society and under which we may grow and work in unity.

"We are sure that humility, expressed by anonymity, is the greatest safeguard that Alcoholics Anonymous can ever have."

Let me just tell you a couple of stories about my own experience with this anonymity Tradition. I had used alcohol for the pursuit of fame and power, in paranoid delusions of grandeur, or to kill off depressions when I was frustrated. Then came this anonymity notion. We were a secret society operating by word of mouth for the first couple of years. But our success exploded all of this. Suddenly things went the other way. People were rushing to reporters and microphones, and I was thoroughly tested in the "fame" department!

Little by little, it quieted down. Over the years since then, few people have deliberately broken their anonymity at the public level. And most of them have come to realize, in the end, that they were creating a most perilous precedent.

I shared this view — reluctantly sometimes, for some of the decisions I had to make were difficult. For example, I remember when the editors of *Time* magazine invited some of us from the A.A. office to lunch. The purpose of the meeting was to provide them with information about the Fellowship. But mainly they wished to print my personal life story, which, of course, would also

include the story of A.A. *Time* has always treated us beautifully, and they guaranteed my anonymity in the sense that they would not use my picture or publish my full name. They pointed out that their circulation ran into the millions. They also said they'd like to put my picture on the cover with my head turned away so that I would not be recognizable, thereby technically keeping my anonymity.

Now, this posed a question to me. In my sensitive position, did I have any right to do anything that might open the door to a perilous precedent? If my face was turned *somewhat* away, it wouldn't be too long before some drunk would turn his face right around to the camera, that was for sure. So the upshot of the meeting was that I just couldn't do it. During my lifetime, certainly, I could not cooperate with any such biographical project, in order to maintain the *spirit* of anonymity at the public level.

Then I had another temptation. This story goes back to one day in Dr. Bob's living room. And here I might interject that my partnership with Dr. Bob was a perfect one. We never had a hard word between us, and the credit is all due to him. His quiet counsel kept me on the track.

It had been decided that Bob would attend mostly to the questions of hospitalization and the development of our Twelfth Step work. Between 1940 and 1950, in the company of that marvelous nun, Sister Ignatia, he had treated 5,000 drunks at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron. His spiritual example was a powerful influence, and he never charged a cent for his medical care. So Dr. Bob became the prince of all twelfth-steppers. Perhaps nobody will ever do such a job again.

Along about 1947, Bob had an operation. But the scalpel missed the cancer, and it grew. Finally, it became painfully obvious that he would pass away. Well, the folks around Akron were greatly distraught. They wanted to do "the right thing." So they came to his home, speaking in the unspoken language of the heart, to let him know how they felt. And then they came up with the idea, put as gently and kindly as possible: "Dr. Bob, you and

Annie ought to have a mausoleum as befits the founder of A.A." They had drawings of it, and they spread them out on the floor. Of course, Bob was very much moved.

I wasn't there at the presentation of the plans for the mausoleum. But shortly afterwards, Bob explained the situation to me. "You know, this is kind of a puzzler," he said. "I appreciate that these folks want to do something real nice for me, the best they can. But Bill, I have a hunch, and I hope you've got a hunch like it, that we ought to be buried just like other people."

That was Dr. Bob's way of wearing the cloak of anonymity. It wasn't that he and I were so blasted noble, but we'd both been living on borrowed time. So, from then on, we decided we'd fall over backwards when it came to anonymity. We'd try to follow, not just the letter of the law — no names or pictures — but the spirit of it.

Oh, from time to time, he and I were offered honorary degrees, with the assurance that our anonymity would be protected, that no full names would be used, no pictures, and so on. But we felt it was safer to preserve the spirit of anonymity by not taking any chances, so we turned them down.

I can remember one occasion, though, when I was pretty sorely tempted. (I cite this instance to prove I'm not really modest, or I wouldn't tell it to you in the first place.) At any rate, word came from Yale University that the trustees would like to make me a doctor of laws. Now, those honorary degrees from great universities aren't exactly a dime a dozen. I suppose they are the highest honor any layman can receive. For a kid raised in Vermont who thought he wanted to be president but couldn't quite make it, this was good stuff!

I took it to the A.A. board of trustees, and they said, "What are you hanging back for, you idiot? Take it!" Considering their efforts to keep me humble on other scores, I was greatly surprised. Then it was pointed out that we had already won the Lasker Award, and now this! Who knows? — we might even reach Stockholm! Besides, it would mean new respectability for A.A. The

"right" people would come into the Fellowship in greater numbers. And heaven knew how many alcoholics might die — particularly among the "right" people — if I did say no. Believe me, this was no easy spot for a guy to be in.

The discussion went back and forth among several A.A. trustees. Finally, Archie Roosevelt, whom many of your remember, looked at me with a half-smile. "Well, Bill," he said, "of course, you know a great deal about my father, Theodore. He was a guy who admittedly had some ego troubles at times. And he therefore made a rule that under no circumstances during his lifetime would he accept one single honorary degree!"

Somehow, that sifted over to me, and I feebly said, "No dice, boys. It's out!"

This is just part of my story and beginning of *our* story.

I would like to conclude with the memory of one of history's great figures and with words dedicated to him that have come down through the centuries. His name was Francis.

Lord, make me a channel of thy peace —
That where there is hatred, I may bring love —
That where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness —
That where there is discord, I may bring harmony —
That where there is error, I may bring truth —
That where there is despair, I may bring hope —
That where there are shadows, I may bring light —
That where there is sadness, I may bring joy.
Lord, grant that I may seek
Rather to comfort than be comforted —
To understand, than to be understood —
To love, than to be loved.
For it is by self-forgetting that one finds.
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.
It is by dying that one awakens to eternal life.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

THE TWELVE CONCEPTS FOR WORLD SERVICE

1. Final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.

2. The General Service Conference of A.A. has become, for nearly every practical purpose, the active voice and the effective conscience for our whole Society in its world affairs.

3. To insure effective leadership, we should endow each element of A.A. — the Conference, the General Service Board and its service corporations, staffs, committees, and executives — with a traditional "Right of Decision."

4. At all responsible levels, we ought to maintain a traditional "Right of Participation," allowing a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge.

5. Throughout our structure, a traditional "Right of Appeal" ought to prevail, so that minority opinion will be heard and personal grievances receive careful consideration.

6. The Conference recognizes that the chief initiative and active responsibility in most world service matters should be exercised by the trustee members of the Conference acting as the General Service Board.

7. The Charter and Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments, empowering the trustees to manage and conduct world service affairs. The Conference Charter is not a legal document; it relies upon tradition and the A.A. purse for final effectiveness.

8. The trustees are the principal planners and administrators of overall policy and finance. They have custodial oversight of the separately incorporated and constantly active services, exercising this through their ability to elect all the directors of these entities.

9. Good service leadership at all levels is indispensable for our future functioning and safety. Primary world service leadership, once exercised by the founders, must necessarily be assumed by the trustees.

10. Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority, with the scope of such authority well defined.

11. The trustees should always have the best possible committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs, and consultants. Composition, qualifications, induction procedures, and rights and duties will always be matters of serious concern.

12. The Conference shall observe the spirit of A.A. tradition, taking care that it never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds and reserve be its prudent financial principle; that it place none of its members in a position of unqualified authority over others; that it reach all important decisions by discussion, vote, and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that its actions never be personally punitive nor an incitement to public controversy; that it never perform acts of government, and that, like the Society it serves, it will always remain democratic in thought and action.

A.A. PUBLICATIONS Complete order forms available from General Service Office of ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

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IS A.A. FOR ME?
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THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS
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THE CO-FOUNDERS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
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A Declaration of Unity

This we owe to A.A.'s future:
To place our common welfare first;
To keep our fellowship united.
For on A.A. unity depend our lives,
And the lives of those to come

I am responsible...

When anyone, anywhere,
reaches out for help, I want
the hand of A.A. always to be there.
And for that: I am responsible