



# Carry the Message

## April, 2007

*The Huron Valley Area Intergroup Newsletter*

*Serving the Recovery Community since 1979*

### Upcoming Area Events

#### April 1, 2007 (1st Sunday):

#### *CMIA Area 32 Monthly Meeting*

Pinckney Masonic Lodge

210 Mann Street (1 block east of  
Dexter-Pinckney Road off M-36)

Pinckney

#### April 16, 2007 (3rd Monday):

#### *District 4 Monthly Meeting*

Ann Arbor Community Center

625 N. Main Street, Ann Arbor

#### April 19, 2007 (3rd Thursday):

#### *District 8 Monthly Meeting*

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 200  
St. Paul Street, Brighton

**HVAI Board meeting (3rd Saturday) is cancelled for April due to the District 4 Workshop Presentation.**

#### April 6—8, 2007: AA and Al-

*Anon Spring Fling* Galesburg, IL  
info:

aa\_springfling@yahoo.com

April 6—8, 2007: 36th Annual  
North Shore Round-up in Van-  
couver, British Columbia Info:  
info@northshoroundup.com

April 14, 2007: Lenawee County  
Intergroup Mini Conference  
Adrian, MI

April 21, 2007: District 4 Work-  
shop: AA Beyond the Tables

at the UAW Hall Local 892

601 Woodland Drive, Saline

**For info: Sandie Marie (734)  
395-8021**

### District Notes

#### District 4:

- Do you need information on the Grapevine? Does your Home group need information about what a Grapevine Representative does? Do you have old issues of the Grapevine that need a new home? Contact Sandie Marie at (734) 395-8021.
- The Treatment Facility Committee is looking for more

members. Our work includes presenting to local facilities about AA. Contact Shannon T. at (734) 678-2478 for more information.

- The Public Information Committee has recently completed the project of assuring that all District 4 area Public Libraries have copies of the Big Book, 12 + 12, and Living Sober. This area includes Ann Arbor, Saline, Ypsilanti, Dexter, and Milan. We are now in the process of contacting area Hospitals to make AA-approved pamphlets and HVAI Meeting Schedules available to the general public.

#### District 8:

- Coming Soon

Burn the idea into the consciousness of every man that he can get well regardless of anyone. The only condition is that he trust in God and clean house.

Pg 98 *Alcoholics Anonymous*

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**Hours:** Tues—Fri, 1 p.m.—6 p.m. **Phone:** (734) 482-0707 **Website:** www.hvai.org **E-mail:** office@hvai.org **Help Line:** (734) 482-5700 or help@hvai.org

## About Bill W.

from *The Best of Bill*

Bill W. was born in East Dorset, Vermont, on November 26, 1895. With Dr. Bob S. of Akron, Ohio, he co-founded Alcoholics Anonymous in 1935. Hospitalized for alcoholism, he experienced a profound spiritual transformation that changed his life and inspired many of the principles of the A. A. movement.

Bill W. recognized that the recurring desire to drink disappears when one alcoholic works with another. This understanding became a basic principle of the new society. In addition, Bill promoted the idea that alcoholism is an illness, which can be arrested but not cured. Influenced by this AA concept, the American Medical Association later redefined alcoholism as a disease, not a failure of will.

AA's basic text, Alcoholics Anonymous, was written largely by Bill W. in association with other early AAs. Since its first publication in 1939, the Big Book, as it's called, has sold more than twenty-two million copies and has been translated into more than forty languages. The revolutionary Twelve-Step program of recovery it contains is the model for many other programs of recovery.

In the Twelve Traditions, first developed and presented in the pages of the Grapevine, Bill created a lasting blueprint for AA unity, incorporating the unique principles of anonymity, self-support, membership, and non-affiliation.

In addition to his many writings, Bill devoted himself to developing an enduring service structure for Alcoholics Anonymous.

In June 1999, *Time* magazine named Bill W. as one of the hundred most influential people of the twentieth century.

He passed away on January 24, 1971.

## Faith

God as We Understand Him

Bill W.

April, 1961

The phrase "God as we understand him" is perhaps the most important expression to be found in our whole AA vocabulary. Within the compass of these five significant words there can be included every kind and degree of faith, together with the positive assurance that each of us may choose his own. Scarcely less valuable to us are those supplemental expressions—"a higher power" and "a power greater than ourselves." For all who deny, or seriously doubt a deity, these frame an open door over whose threshold the unbeliever

can take his first easy step into a reality hitherto unknown to him—the realm of faith.

In AA such breakthroughs are everyday events. They are all the more remarkable when we reflect that a working faith had once seemed an impossibility of the first magnitude to perhaps half of our present membership of over 300,000. To all these doubters has come the great discovery that as soon as they could cast their main dependence upon a "higher power"—even upon their own AA groups—they had turned that blind corner which had always kept the open highway from their view. From this time on—assuming they tried hard to practice the rest of the AA program with a relaxed and open mind—an ever deepening and broadening faith, a veritable gift, had invariably put in its sometimes unexpected and often mysterious appearance.

We much regret that these facts of AA life are not understood by the legion of alcoholics in the world around us. Any number of them are bedeviled by the dire conviction that if ever they go near AA they will be pressured to conform to some particular brand of faith or theology. They just don't realize that faith is never a necessity for AA membership; that sobriety can be achieved within easily acceptable minimum of it; and that our concepts of a higher power and God as we understand him afford every-

one a nearly unlimited choice of spiritual belief and action.

How to transmit this good news is one of our most challenging problems in communication, for which there may be no fast or sweeping answer. Perhaps our public information services could begin to emphasize this all-important aspect of AA more heavily. And within our own ranks we might well develop a more sympathetic awareness of the acute plight of these really isolated and desperate sufferers. In their aid we can settle for no less than the best possible attitude and the most ingenious action that we can muster.

We can also take a fresh look at the problem of “no faith” as it exists right on our own doorstep. Though 300,000 have recovered in the last twenty-five years, maybe half a million more have walked into our midst, and then out again. No doubt some were too sick to make even a start. Others couldn’t or wouldn’t admit their alcoholism. Still others couldn’t face up to their underlying personality defects. Numbers departed for still other reasons.

Yet we can’t well content ourselves with the view that all these recovery failures were entirely the fault of the newcomers themselves. Perhaps a great many didn’t receive the kind and amount of sponsorship they so sorely needed. We didn’t communicate

when we might have done so. So we AAs failed them. Perhaps more often than we think, we still make no contact at depth with those suffering the dilemma of no faith.

Certainly none are more sensitive to spiritual cocksureness, pride, and aggression than they are. I’m sure this is something we too often forget. In AA’s first years I all but ruined the whole undertaking with this sort of unconscious arrogance. God as *I* understood him *had* to be for everybody. Sometimes my aggression was subtle and sometimes it was crude. But either way it was damaging—perhaps fatally so—to numbers of non-believers. Of course this sort of thing isn’t confined to Twelfth Step work. It is very apt to leak out into our relations with everybody. Even now, I catch myself chanting that same old barrier-building refrain, “Do as *I* do, believe as *I* do—or else!”

Here’s a recent example of the high cost of spiritual pride. A very tough-minded prospect was taken to his first AA meeting. The first speaker majored on his own drinking pattern. The prospect seemed impressed. The next two speakers (or maybe lecturers) each themed their talks on “God as I understand him.” This could have been good, too, but it certainly wasn’t. The trouble was their attitude, the way they presented their experience. They did ooze arrogance. In fact, the final speaker got far overboard on some of his personal theological convictions. With perfect fidelity,

both were repeating my performance of years before. Quite unspoken, yet implicit in everything they said, was the same idea—”Folks, listen to us. We have the only true brand of AA—and you’d better get it!”

The new prospect said he’d had it—and he had. His sponsor protested that this wasn’t real AA. But it was too late; nobody could touch him after that. He also had a first class alibi for yet another bender. When last heard from, an early appointment with the undertaker seemed probable.

Fortunately, such rank aggression in the name of spirituality isn’t often seen nowadays. Yet this sorry and unusual episode can be turned to good account. We can ask ourselves whether, in less obvious but nevertheless destructive forms, we are not more subject to fits of spiritual pride than we had supposed. If constantly worked at, I’m sure that no kind of self-survey could be more beneficial. Nothing could more surely increase our communication with each other and with God.

Many years ago a so-called unbeliever brought me to see this very clearly. He was an M.D. and a fine one. I met him and his wife Mary at the home of a friend in a Midwestern city. It was purely a social evening. Our Fellowship of alcoholics was my sole topic and I pretty much monopolized the conversation. Nevertheless, the doctor

and his lady seemed truly interested and he asked many questions. But one of them made me suspect that he was an agnostic, or maybe an atheist.

This promptly triggered me, and I set out to convert him, then and there. Deadly serious, I actually bragged about my spectacular spiritual experience of the year before. The doctor mildly wondered if that experience might not be something other than I thought it was. This hit me hard, and I was downright rude. There had been no real provocation; the doctor was uniformly courteous, good—humored, and even respectful. Not a little wistfully, he said he often wished he had a firm faith, too. But plainly enough, I had convinced him of nothing.

Three years later I revisited my Midwestern friend. Mary, the doctor's wife, came by for a call and I learned that he had died the week before. Much affected, she began to speak of him.

His was a noted Boston family, and he'd been Harvard educated. A brilliant student, he might have gone on to fame in his profession. He could have enjoyed a wealthy practice and a social life among old friends. Instead, he had insisted on being a company doctor in what was a strife-torn industrial town. When Mary had sometimes asked why they didn't go back to Boston, he would take her hand and say, "Maybe you are right, but

I can't bring myself to leave. I think the people at the company really need me."

Mary then recalled that she had never known her husband to complain seriously about anything, or to criticize anyone bitterly. Though he appeared to be perfectly well, the doctor had slowed down in his last five years. When Mary prodded him to go out evenings, or tried to get him to the office on time, he always came up with a plausible and good-natured excuse. Not until his sudden last illness did she know that all this while he had carried about a heart condition that could have done him in at any moment. Except for a single doctor on his own staff, no one had an inkling. When she reproached him about this, he simply said, "Well, I could see no good in causing people to worry about me—especially you, my dear."

This was the story of a man of great spiritual worth. The hallmarks were plain to be seen: humor and patience, gentleness and courage, humility and dedication, unselfishness and love—a demonstration I might never come near to making myself. This was the man I had chided and patronized. This was the "unbeliever" I had presumed to instruct!

Mary told us this story more than twenty years ago. Then, for the first time, it burst in upon me how very dead faith can be—when minus responsibility. The doctor had an un-

wavering belief in his ideals. But he also practiced humility, wisdom, and responsibility. Hence his superb demonstration.

My own spiritual awakening had given me a built-in faith in God—a gift indeed. But I had been neither humble nor wise. Boasting of my faith, I had forgotten my ideals. Pride and irresponsibility had taken their place. By so cutting off my own light, I had little to offer my fellow alcoholics. Therefore my faith was dead to them. At last I say why many had gone away—some of them forever.

Therefore, faith is more than our greatest gift; its sharing with others is our greatest responsibility. So may we of AA continually seek the wisdom and the willingness by which we may well fulfill that immense trust which the giver of all perfect gifts has placed in our hands.

## Thank You for your March Contributions to the HVA!

**The Milford Group**

**The Laughing in Sobriety Group—Ann Arbor**

**Saturday Morning Men's Group—Ann Arbor**

**The Flim-Flam Group—Ann Arbor**

**The Attitude Adjustment Group—Ann Arbor**

**The Came to Believe Group—Ann Arbor**

**The Sunday Men's Group—Ann Arbor**

**The Get Straight Candlelight Group—Ann Arbor**

**The Weekend by the Book Group—Ann Arbor**

**The Monday Nighters Group—Ann Arbor**