



## **Barrie & Area Intergroup Newsletter** **April 2010**



### **Barrie & Area Intergroup Meeting**

**April 09 2010** at 7:00 pm

Central United church, 54 Ross Street, Barrie  
&

### **Georgian Bay South District 8**

**Committee Meeting**

**Sunday, April 11th**

**St. Georges Anglican Church**

Corner of Burton Ave and Granville St, Barrie ON from 1:30 to 3:00 pm.

***Mark Your Calendar ! or Check the web:*** [www.barrieaa.com](http://www.barrieaa.com)  
for more detailed listing of events & Updated Meeting List

### ***Barrie and Area Intergroup/ Central Office:***

***622-80 Bradford St.  
Barrie, ON, L4N 6S7  
(705) 725-8682***

***Literature Hours: Tues. & Thurs 12-4 & Mon. & Fri. 4-7p.m.***

### **The 15th Annual Men's Spiritual Retreat**

**A Weekend of  
Recovery and  
Fellowship  
7, 8, 9 May 2010  
Stayner Conference  
Grounds  
Stayner, Ontario**

### ***45th Annual Niagara Blossom Time Convention***

***7,8 & 9 May 2010  
Niagara Falls,  
Ontario***

***[www.blossomtimeconvent  
ion.com](http://www.blossomtimeconvent<br/>ion.com)***

***34th Annual  
Barrie Spring Roundup  
Saturday, 17 April, 2010  
Collier Street United Church  
112 Collier Street  
Barrie, Ontario  
"TICKETS"  
\$30.00 Includes  
Registration, Dinner & Dance  
Greg F. 705-252-4782***

***Or at your Intergroup  
705-725-8682***

# FEATURED ARTICLES

## Bill's Wife Remembers When He and She and the First A. A.'s Were Very Young

As the wife of an early A.A., some of our experiences and my reactions to my husband's changed life may be interesting to other wives. Bill was an alcoholic, I believe, from the first drink he ever took, just a few months before our marriage. From then on, for seventeen years, I did everything I could think of to keep him away from liquor.

I will tell a little of our life before A.A. to help explain some of my later emotions. Bill and I had no children, so I soon felt that my job in life was to help Bill straighten himself out. As time went on, he earnestly tried to stop drinking. He was always very remorseful and perplexed the mornings-after. We would then resolve to lick this liquor situation together, launching off on some new tack.

As his drinking got worse, all decision and responsibility had to be taken by me. It was lucky that we were companionable, for gradually as our social contacts were broken we were thrust back on each other for company. In order to get away from alcohol over the week ends, I used to engineer some sort of outing, as we both loved the outdoors. If our pocketbook was flat, we might take the subway to the Dyckman Street ferry and hike along the Palisades to some scenic spot where we would nibble our sandwiches and gaze at the view. Or we might ferry to Staten Island and walk there; perhaps broiling a steak over a campfire. We have hired a rowboat at Yonkers and, using a bath towel as a sail, floated up the Hudson, to a spit of land near Nyack, where we camped and tried to sleep. We once went so far to get away from alcohol that we both gave up our jobs and took a whole year off. This we spent motorcycling and camping over half the United States.

These trips, although good for Bill's health, did nothing towards his permanent sobriety. In fact, his alcoholism grew steadily more serious. He lost job after job until I became entirely hopeless about him.

And then suddenly and finally Bill straightened out through the help of an old friend. At once I was convinced of his complete change and was of course extremely happy. Bill began to go to religious meetings and to work feverishly with alcoholics. I would go to meetings too and would try to share his newfound enthusiasms. He always had some drunk in tow and would work all night or get up in the middle of the night to go to the suburbs if one called him. We had drunks all over the house; sometimes as many as five lived there at one time.

One drunk committed suicide in the house after having sold about 700 dollars worth of our clothes and luggage. Another slid down the coal chute from the street to the cellar when we refused him the front door. Two others took to fighting, and one chased the other all around the house with a carving knife. The intended victim was saved by a third drunk, who delivered the knife-minded one a knockout blow. An alcoholic who was living in the basement was invited up for a pancake breakfast. After eating his share, he suddenly put on his hat and started out of the door remarking that he was going to Childs for "PLENTY of pancakes".

Bill had found himself a job about this time; and it used to take him away from home a great deal and I was left with one or more alcoholics to look after. Once one of these boys lay in the vestibule all night and screamed invectives at me because I would not let him in. He was so loud the passers-by all stopped, looked and listened. Another time it was 4 a.m. before I succeeded in towing a drunk home. He was anxious to be at his job the next morning and we had gone out around midnight to look for a doctor, having been unable to get one to come to the house at that hour. I helped his shaky steps up and down stoops, lit his cigarettes for him and finally, when we could not rouse a doctor, held a drink to his lips in a bar. When I asked him how he then felt he said, "Well, a bird can't fly on one wing." After a few more drinks I managed to get him home, but he did not get to his job the next morning. I was once suddenly taken sick, and when my sister arrived to nurse me she found five men milling around in the living room, one of them muttering, "One woman can look after five drunks but five drunks cannot look after one woman."

Now to describe my reactions to it all.

When Bill first sobered up I was terribly happy but soon, without my realizing it, I began to resent the fact that Bill and I never spent any time together any more. I stayed at home while he went off somewhere scouting up new drunks or working with old ones. My life's job of sobering up Bill with all its former responsibilities was suddenly taken away from me. I had not yet found anything to fill the void. And then there was the feeling of being on the outside of a very tight little clique of alcoholics into which no mere wife could possibly enter. I did not understand what was going on within

myself until one Sunday, Bill asked me to go with him to a meeting. To my own surprise as well as his I burst forth with, "Damn all your meetings," and threw my shoe at him as hard as I could.

This bad display of temper woke me up. I realized that I had been wallowing in self pity; that Bill's change was simply miraculous; that his feverish activity with alcoholics was absolutely necessary to his sobriety; and that if I did not want to be left way behind I had better jump on the bandwagon, too

Bill W.'s wife, Lois Wilson **Reprinted with the permission of the AA Grapevine inc,**

### *Tradition Four*

4.) With respect to its own affairs, each A.A. group should be responsible to no other authority than its own conscience. But when its plans concern the welfare of neighboring groups also, those groups ought to be consulted. And no group, regional committee, or individual should ever take any action that might greatly affect A.A. as a whole without conferring with the Trustees of the General Service Board. On such issues our common welfare is paramount.

### In AA we demand - But that doesn't give us the right to push others around

AT THE MOMENT when Ebby T. said to Bill W., "Why don't you choose your own conception of God?," our Fourth Tradition began to germinate, it seems to me.

As page 12 of the second and third editions of the book Alcoholics Anonymous shows, that question freed Bill almost miraculously from the prison of his old ideas. And I can now use that notion, as expressed in our Fourth Tradition, as my own charter for personal freedom in AA- as long as I behave responsibly.

"Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole," the Tradition says.

The idea got to me during my first year in AA, 1945, through the slogan Live and Let Live. At that time, I was so hypercritical of everyone that I lived in an almost perpetual state of negative feelings about people. My first AA mentors helped me apply the slogan to my family and to others I was continually finding fault with, including AAs.

Maybe this aspect of our program has more to do with the effectiveness of AA than has been widely recognized. Sitting in judgment on other people--a constant preoccupation of mine while drinking--is a temptation that keeps recurring. God is a heavy role to play, and I've conclusively proved to myself many times that my life becomes unmanageable when I try. In helping to free me from that shortcoming, or defect of character, Tradition Four has proved priceless in my own AA life.

I gingerly tiptoed around the edges of Step Three during my early AA months, not *too* scared of it; after all, it did say, ". . . *God as we understood Him,*" Step Four suggested that for my own recovery I pass judgment solely on myself, not on anyone else. Step Eight suggested that I concern myself with the inventory of myself only, not with the inventory of persons I had harmed or who I felt had harmed me.

So, despite the fact that Tradition Four had not yet been spelled out, I think its basic idea of liberty coupled with responsibility was already operating to help me stay sober my first year. As I have since detected other outcroppings of it in many forms within our Fellowship, it seems to slap some new humility into me every time. That is a prime value all the Traditions have in my recovery.

Once, an agnostic member began to object to our group's closing the meeting with the Lord's Prayer. True, he said, the group did not force anyone to pray; but the weight of social pressure pushed everyone heavily in that direction, and since that one particular prayer is identified with one religion, he asked the group to change its custom.

For weeks we discussed it, at times even rationally. Two members, one pro, one anti, wrote GSO about it, each sure GSO or the board of trustees would rule his faction right, the other wrong. Both were irritated when they got GSO's reply--that it was up to the group to decide for itself. (I empathize. I still don't like being told, "Grow up.")

No formal group vote ever occurred, because the objecting friend and some who agreed with him decided to start a new group, with entirely different customs. As a result, for years now there have been two thriving groups where only

one existed before--twin fruits of Tradition Four--and I have often been able to get from both precisely the help I needed.

The liberty each of us has to start new groups, experiment with meeting formats, or change our home group provides a resilience in AA that has been important in my sobriety. AA is so flexible, it is hard to fight. Anything we don't like about it, we know we are free to change. We do not need anyone's permission, and no one can declare us wrong or overrule us or read us out. As I and some other "slippers" have learned, we can't resign from AA, because there is nothing to send your resignation to! We can't break AA rules, because there aren't any. How can I take my marbles and run away from a game played without marbles?

The freedom from the necessity of passing judgments on one another has prevented the Fellowship from breaking up in all kinds of disputes. If the General Service Board, GSO, or the Conference constantly refereed arguments among groups or members, it would be tantamount to pronouncing one side or the other wrong. We'd probably keep squabbling until the unhappy losers went away. And this would happen over and over, after every such judgment was passed.

Instead, we are told--sometimes to our exasperation--to decide for ourselves.

Local central offices operate under the same guiding principle, of course. Here in Manhattan, years ago, we formed an intergroup association. For a while, it was a delicate little thing. Its fragile life could easily have been shattered if its steering committee had tried to dictate to groups about officers, or meetings, or whatever. Every resistant group could have simply withdrawn its volunteers and financial support--and poof, no intergroup! Instead, the association decided each group was autonomous, thus avoiding the kind of intra-AA squabble that could have been fatal.

Perhaps this Tradition derived from the ego-inflicted suffering some of our first AAs had to endure after getting sober. Robert Thomsen shows so beautifully in *Bill W.*, his stunning biography of AA's chief architect, that co-founder Bill tried and tried to impose various orthodoxies on AA, only to be frustrated painfully time after time.

One of the delights of growing older can be a lessening of my compelling desire to make everybody else do things right. (For "right," read "my way.") It is liberating to learn repeatedly that I cannot bend AA to fit just my particular shape. The pain of such struggle disappears when I can let other AAs have things their own way. That leaves me more energy that I can devote to my number one problem: me.

The price I must pay for this freedom is a corollary responsibility. I have virtually unlimited independence in AA, as long as I act within the framework of the last part of the Fourth Tradition.

Recently, I decided to stop paying my dues in a political organization. The fee is small, and the club takes very little of my time. I still believe in its purpose and generally approve its methods. So why, I wondered, did I want to resign?

Examining my last few contacts with the society, I realized why I wanted out. I had encountered some members (not all, just some) who seemed to me unpleasant and not entirely trustworthy. (I was better at finding such faults in people when I was drinking, but since sobering up I have certainly not lost all my skill at taking others' inventories!)

I caught myself in time. I was judging the whole outfit by a few of its members. Because I found a few not to my liking, I was condemning the whole group. That reminded me of the last part of our Fourth Tradition: ". . .except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole."

Again, I saw that anyone who knows I am an AA member may just as easily judge all of AA by me. If I am found unpleasant and unreliable, someone may easily say, "Those AAs are nasty and dishonest."

Each of us may be the only AA experience some people have. The Fourth Tradition gives me no license to behave in any way that reflects bad on AA.

That's a sobering thought, isn't it? I find that's literally true of all our Traditions, for me.

B. L. Manhattan, New York Reprinted with the permission of the AA Grapevine inc,