The Third Tradition Group
of
Alcoholics Anonymous

Our History
FORWARD

We, the Third Tradition Group, have endeavored to bring together a sharing of our experience as a group. This is being done for two reasons.

First, we are following the example set by Dr. Bob and Bill: who one day in Akron sat counting noses of the sober members of Alcoholics Anonymous. When they were done, the magnitude of the gift they had been given flooded in on them. Based on this, there is a description of AA’s first convention in 1950 as, “an opportunity to thankfully contemplate what God has wrought in our lives.” As we begin to celebrate our 20th anniversary as a group: we, too, want to share the miracle which has taken place here.

Secondly, we want to provide you, the reader, a view into the lives that comprise our group. Lives that would undoubtedly have ended either sooner or later had we not found sobriety and a relationship with a Power Greater than ourselves.

Some of the stories you will read in the ‘Members Share’ section are previously shared experiences of members who only walked with us for a time. For various reasons they have moved on.

In some cases, they have come to believe they are not alcoholic. During their stay with us they faced their difficulties and were able to move on. We still see them on occasion and wish them well, grateful for their time with us.

In other cases, they have moved on to other groups. Some in the Northfield area and some elsewhere. Here, again, we are happy they stayed with us a while and believe they must follow their path as they see it. We know they will be strong additions to any group they choose.

As a group we believe we are merely an instrument. We are not the only avenue to God’s grace, nor are we the single repository of it.
My dear friends, recently an A.A. member sent me an unusual greeting which I would like to extend to you. He told me it was an ancient Arabian salutation. Perhaps we have no Arabian groups, but it still seems a fitting expression of how I feel for each of you. It says: “I salute you and thank you for your life.”

My thoughts are much occupied these days with gratitude to our Fellowship and for the myriad blessings bestowed upon us by God’s Grace.

If I were asked which of these blessings I felt was most responsible for our growth as a fellowship and most vital to our continuity, I would say, the “Concept of Anonymity.”

Anonymity has two attributes essential to our individual and collective survival; the spiritual and practical.

On the spiritual level, anonymity demands the greatest discipline of which we are capable; on the practical level, anonymity has brought protection for the newcomer, respect and support of the world outside, and security from those of us who would use A.A. for sick and selfish purposes.

A.A. must and will continue to change with the passing years. We cannot, nor should we, turn back the clock. However, I deeply believe that the principle of anonymity must remain our primary and enduring safeguard. As long as we accept our sobriety in our traditional spirit of anonymity we will continue to receive God’s Grace.

And so—once more, I salute you in that spirit and again I thank you for your lives.

May God bless us all now, and forever.
The foundations that underpin the Third Traditions Group have their basis in a combination of events, people, and societies not often spoken about in our meetings. To truly do justice to the history of this group, a recounting of those forces is warranted.

We must start on a Thursday evening in Baltimore, Maryland. The date is April 2nd, 1840 and the place is Chases’ Tavern on Liberty Street. In the tavern that evening were six friends who drank there almost every evening. They were William Mitchell – a tailor, John Hoss – a carpenter, David Anderson and George Steers – blacksmiths, James McCurly – a coach maker, and Archibald Campbell – a silversmith.

As entertainment, these six decided to go to a temperance meeting being held that night. As the result of their attendance, on the following Sunday, April 5, 1840, these six began the Washingtonian Society. This society was, in their own words, “a society for our mutual benefit, and to guard against a pernicious practice which is injurious to our health, standing, and families, do pledge ourselves as gentlemen that we will not drink any spirituous or malt liquors, wine or cider.” It was a society, Like Alcoholics Anonymous who followed it many years later, based on total abstinence from alcohol.

The experience of these alcoholics, and the society they began, has a significant bearing on both the beginning and survival of the Third Tradition Group of Alcoholics Anonymous. Their society lasted only a little more than 8 years. In their first year they sobered up about 1000 drunks. At their peak, they counted at least 100,000 drunks and 300,000 hard drinking potential alcoholics among their members. And yet, in only 8 short years their society died, and we can assume that most, if not all, of their members eventually returned to the living hell we call alcoholism.
They are important to us because of both their similarities to Alcoholics Anonymous and their differences.

They were similar in 7 ways:

- They were alcoholics helping each other.
- The needs and interests of alcoholics were kept central.
- They held weekly meetings.
- In the meetings they shared their experiences.
- Fellowship of the group or its members was constantly available.
- They relied on the power of God.
- They practiced total abstinence from alcohol.

They were different in 5 ways:

- They allowed non-alcoholics, or those with other problems to become members.
- They had no single purpose. They also attempted to house ... employee alcoholics. They also engaged in developing opinions outside their society.
- They had no clear-cut program of recovery. Each member could develop his or her own program.
- They did not believe in anonymity. Their people were constantly having their names put in the paper.
- They had no Traditions that guided them in how to preserve unity, and failed to develop any.
To understand the basis of what we have in common, and what they lost, we need only review two stanzas of one of their songs:

This world's not all a fleeting show,
   For man's illusion given;
He that hath sooth'd a drunkard's woe,
   And led him to reform, doth know;
There's something here of heaven.

The Washingtonian that hath run,
   The path of kindness even;
Who's meas'rd out life's little span,
   In deeds of love to God and man;
On earth hath tasted heaven.

Some 99 years later another fellowship, Alcoholics Anonymous, was to include this sentiment in the pre-publication manuscript of their basic text.

We now move ahead to the year 1931 and see a young financial wizard who has tried several methods to recover from alcoholism. Finally, in desperation he places himself under the care of a Swiss psychiatrist by the name of Carl Jung. In the year that followed he learned all the workings of his mind and its quirks. Yet upon release from the clinic – he got drunk. He returned to Zurick and asked the noted man what else could be done. The doctor pronounced him hopeless.

After making this deathly pronouncement, he told Rowland Hazard that his only hope was to be found in the following prescription: “Spiritus contra Spiritum” — a phrase that meant that a spiritual life was the only remedy for a life of the spirits. Rowland returned to the U.S. and began to attend Oxford Group meetings to improve his spiritual life. He also began active work with other alcoholics, namely one called Ebby Thatcher.

At this point in the narration you may be wondering what all this has to do with the simple task of starting an A.A. group. These
events, people, and principles were what guide the Third Tradition Group in the early years and if you listen closely to the start of each of the groups’ meetings, you will be able to identify where those practices originated and why.

Jumping forward 2 years, to 1933, and the city of Akron, Ohio, the Oxford Group there has a new person by the name of Dr. Robert Smith. He has begun to attend these meetings in an effort to recover from alcoholism. Although he is thorough in his practice of their way of life, he is unable to recover from his alcoholism – but he continues to attend their meetings.

The following year, 1934, a young stockbroker, named Bill Wilson, is hospitalized again for his alcoholism in Towns Hospital in New York City. Although he had been there many times, this was his last journey there. In his previous hospitalization, Dr. Silkworth has also pronounced him a hopeless case. He was told that he would have to be institutionalized or his drinking would result in madness and death within the year.

During his brief time at home, before this last hospital stay, he had been visited by an old friend, Ebby Thatcher. Ebby shared his experience at finding a way to live sober through the Oxford Groups and Rowland Hazard. Although Bill thought he could not accept the religious approach proposed by Ebby, during this hospital stay he became willing to try anything. While at this low point in his life, Bill had his spiritual experience. This began his permanent sobriety, and he began to attend Oxford Group meetings.

Six months later Bill was in Akron, Ohio to engage in a proxy fight. This being a difficult task as well as distasteful, Bill became concerned about his relatively new sobriety. He called a member of the clergy who put him in touch
with another drunk. Bill was absolutely sure he needed this drunk to talk to much more than the drunk needed him. Although Dr. Bob stopped drinking at this time, he was to have one slip before the first month was over. June 10, 1935 was Dr. Bob’s last drink and the beginning of the A.A. fellowship.

When asked, years later, why he had not been able to stay sober in the Oxford Groups, and Bill had, he explained that Bill brought him the idea of service to another alcoholic. This, he felt, was the reason he was now able to stay sober.

By the year 1939 AA had grown to 4 groups with about 100 members. This was the year our Big Book was first published. It was also the year that a permanent break was made with the Oxford Groups. Although the Oxford Groups had a definite program to follow—they lacked the other four points that separates A.A. from the Washingtonians.

A.A. grew slowly at first and then it expanded in leaps and bounds. In 1939 and 1941 there were several articles in the newspapers and magazines that turned the tide. These articles served to show us the need for, and success of, sponsorship. Before this the entire group had worked with each new recruit. Now, this was no longer possible. It was found that one or two sponsors could be just as effective at conveying our message as the group was. That message was the same as it is, here in the Third Tradition Group, today—AA is not the power that will solve your problems, it is simply the method by which you can find the power of a loving God who can give you the courage to live!

Now we finally come to Northfield. It is Sunday morning, August 15, 1982. Over 400 AA’s and their spouses have gathered at the 34th Annual Southern Minnesota Conference to hear Paul M., from Riverside, Ill speak. On this day, Paul is celebrating his 35th AA birthday. During his sharing, he relates his own experience at trying other forms of self-help and therapies. He also relates the failure he found with them. He shares his perspective on AA and the necessity of keeping it simple and not diluting our program with other things.
In the audience sit six men who had been talking with one another about the very same things Paul is mentioning. Since most of the AA groups they had come in contact with were becoming less structured and more treatment oriented, they were somewhat reluctant to challenge this turn of events in their own groups. Perhaps, they thought, this new trend was the right way to go. However, somewhere deep inside them they sensed that something was not as it should be. Paul’s talk gave them the necessary understanding and courage to undertake the formation of a new AA group. Now they knew they weren’t alone. There were others who understood AA as they did. What was described in the Big Book could, and would, happen in the right environment and with a sincere effort.

The following Thursday, August 18, 1982 these six men sat around a table in the rear of an old bank building, which was being remodeled, to discuss the formation of a new group. They included a businessman, carpenter, salesman, draftsman, and 2 truck drivers. Unknown to them at the time, they wanted a group that avoided the five points that differentiated the Washingtonians from A.A. They wanted a group that dealt with alcoholism and alcoholics only; one which had the single purpose of helping alcoholics find freedom from alcohol; one that discussed and
attempted to convey the message of Alcoholics Anonymous only—leaving out any other therapy or the theory of any institution. They wanted anonymity in the sense that only those at the meeting would know who was at the meeting. Foremost in their minds was a return to the Twelve Traditions, as written, in order that they might survive.

During the meeting they agreed on several points they felt were of primary importance for the group. Among them were:

- Non-alcoholic drug addicts would be referred to another fellowship better qualified to be of help with this problem.
- This group, for their meetings, would use only literature published by Alcoholics Anonymous.
- That the “language of the heart” would be spoken rather that the language of any institution or form of therapy.
- In agreement with the General Service Conference of that year, the group would not hold hands during the opening or closing of the meetings.
- The group would work hard to establish a group conscience and maintain it properly so that it could be an active part of AA worldwide.

The beginning of a new group is often difficult in a small community such as Northfield. The early days of the Third Tradition Group were no exception. Some, in the other groups, disagreed with the beliefs of the group, and others took exception to the method of beginning the group. Tempers flared and accusations were made. However, through studying the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, the group was able to understand that their fellow AA’s were simply concerned about how this new group would affect their own group. This, of course, is only natural. The group stuck to its “primary purpose”, which it had clearly defined before starting. It was careful not to engage in competition or controversy with other groups. It simply minded its own
business, careful to consider the effect on the other groups before arriving at any decision or course of action.

God has been kind to the Third Tradition Group, as time has gone by. It outgrew the first meeting place about the same time the rent agreement ran out. The present home, below Village Drug, was found at the last minute. The members struggled with finding a new home, but had to often remind themselves that God would provide the location if they did the footwork—and so He did. The owner of this building has been a great friend of the group and a wonderful landlord.

Over time, the group has had its difficulties. Sometimes this has resulted in other new groups in Northfield, and at still other times members have had to struggle to find the right approach to tough problems. The number of core members has always remained about the same, even though many have moved away from Northfield or started other groups. Today, the group maintains three meetings per week; provides trusted servants for local, state and national services; accepts and meets its financial responsibilities to its landlord and AA’s service entities; and remains an active voice in the society of Alcoholics Anonymous.
This has been accomplished, not by the “sacred six” (as one member, perhaps hearing the history one too many times, refers to them), but by a loving God. Each and every person who has been a member has in some way found the courage to listen to the God of his or her understanding. In doing so, he or she has become active in chairing meetings, sponsorship, actively participated in the group conscience meetings, and volunteered for the other duties AA requires from time to time. Through this, the members of this group can identify with the experience of Dr. Bob and Bill W on that morning in Akron when they sat counting up the number of sober AA’s. When they had finished the count, they felt somewhat in awe of the scene before them. Their comment was, as ours should be, “What has God wrought in our lives?”

Responsibility Pledge

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.
Our Members Share

Recollections, about the group, from those who came to get sober.

Mark – He thought he would change a few things. (1982)

How I found the group; I found the group through my sponsor. I was going to meetings up at Carleton and Maggie was there and Pete G. and it was meeting on Wednesday nights and it wasn’t getting that much support, you might say. This group was just starting up. It started three to six weeks before I sobered up. So anyway, when I got Denny for my sponsor, and then Maggie started coming down here, I thought I might as well come down here too. I was worried because it was off-campus. At the time we were meeting at the old bank building down by the bridge. It was a very friendly atmosphere. There were a lot of people there who have gone on, a lot of them sober. We just started out with the Wednesday night meeting and graduated to having the Friday night meeting once a month and it was awhile before we had a weekly Friday night meeting.

But one of the early things we did was to have these pancake breakfasts down there on Saturday morning. It was kind of nice for a new guy like me who, you know my friends were still asleep Saturday morning, so it was a chance for me to come down and meet some new people, and very friendly people – always a handshake there. I guess I felt at home pretty quickly because people were willing to spend time outside of the meeting with me.

You don’t hear much about groups sponsoring each other now; there was some of that back then. We tried to get in touch with other groups and share meetings.

There were eventually a lot of things I wanted to change about the group, and I think the beautiful thing about our group is that the opportunity is
there in the Group Conscience Meeting. Seems like things were taken pretty seriously and sometimes it might look like it’s too serious about whether we say the Lords Prayer or not or, you know, can we have a flag? was a big issue at one time. It’s really not the issue – it’s the concern that everyone shows. Like a new guy can go to the Group Conscience Meeting and say something and everyone listens. It’s surprising because usually by the time we get here people are pretty much done listening to us.

The notion of a home group has been important here. We’ve run people out because they wanted to have two home groups. And you can’t do that. It’s very important. I get up to the cities and that idea of a home group is not as common, you know, they have a home cluster of groups or something. What does it say? - “Our person recovery depends on AA unity”, and that starts with the sponsorship and then with the group. A lot of individuals didn’t make it because their groups didn’t.

Harold – He searched for wisdom. (1983)
(From a talk given in 1991)

I came down here – I think I was six months sober. I didn’t sober up in this group – I went to a treatment center in Burnsville. I wasn’t too sure if I needed to go there at all, except for the six weeks. You know, when I went there they asked me if I could stay sober and not smoke marijuana for six weeks, and I agreed to do that. And I thought once I got through that I was going to have all these answers on how to live my life, and the wisdom I needed to go about my business. They had AA speakers come in and they wrecked it for me.

I found out that I was going to have to do a few other things when I got through this treatment thing. I went to AA meetings when I first sobered up to meet girls – I didn’t go there because I really wanted to work the steps. I just didn’t want to be sick – I didn’t really want to get well. There
is a difference! Actually, sometimes I go through periods of months where I just don’t want to get sicker. And after I’ve done that long enough, I decide I want to get well and I start praying again.

I went to a meeting at the Northfield Group, which met at St. Johns Lutheran Church, it was on a Tuesday night, they asked at that meeting if anyone wanted to go down to Family Focus Treatment Center and speak. They had a thing signed up where they had some AA members go down to a give a little talk, and I knew something about you’re supposed to do Twelfth Step work, and of course I have an ego, and I said I would go. On the way back from that meeting there was a gal that was driving, I rode along down there and we talked, and she said there’s this new group under the Snyder Drug Store, and they just started down there, and there’s a lot of young people down there, a lot of college people and it’s a really interesting group. We stopped in and came down to this meeting, on Wednesday night, and for probably the first ten meetings I went to I didn’t hear the introduction – you know where they talk about if you an alcoholic, problem drinker – that’s how we introduce ourselves. I kept introducing myself as “I’m Harold and I’m chemically dependent. Finally after about a month of this, a guy that was a regular member down here at the time cornered me and asked me if I was an alcoholic. I said, “Yea, I guess so”. Then he said, “Well, then why don’t you introduce yourself as one”.

I wasn’t going to come back. But I did, and I found out what an alcoholic was – finally. If you come long enough, and listen, you find that stuff out.

Some of the things that happened to me down here; I would come down to the meetings on a Friday night, or on a Wednesday night and I would throw my coat on and leave as soon as the meeting was done. One night I was running out the door to go to a bar – I was going to go to a bar and dance – I was throwing on my coat to go out the door and Dick K said to me, “Where are you going?” And I said, “I’m going up the road to Lakeville, to this bar – but I’m not going to drink, I’m just going there to dance. That’s where all my friends are.” And he said, “No, all your friends are in AA, but you have to stick around long enough to meet them.” So I split anyhow, of course. But I thought about that. The next week the same thing happened. And Dick said to me “You know if you sit in the barbers chair long enough you’re going to get a haircut.” I didn’t really know what he meant until I got about halfway there and then it dawned on me what he was talking about. It ruined my drinking –
I’m sure of that. I didn’t go there and drink, but after that I couldn’t even feel comfortable being in a bar. I started getting nervous. And I started to realize how bored I was sitting on a bar stool watching other people drink. So I just quit going to the bars.

I started hanging around AA more and I was asked to do stuff like chair a meeting and be Secretary and I was elected to be the Intergroup Rep. I was the only one who ran. I had to drive way up to Minneapolis to go to the meetings. I would get up there and tell them I was from the Third Tradition Group in Northfield and somebody had already been up there and raised a bunch of hell – so they didn’t like me right from the start.

But I got involved in the group and the group activity and it really changed my idea of Alcoholics Anonymous. I became a member and a part of something instead of what I was trying to do by straightening out my life. You know, I was going to straighten out my life at home somehow – watching TV, I guess, I don’t know.

Of course I did keep coming to meetings to meet women. Not very many of them showed up here. Once in awhile we’d get a new girl and everybody would gang up on me and say, “leave the new girls alone”.

We had a lot of fellowship – that’s important. I think anybody who’s new, whether you’re single or married – needs to have the fellowship. This group offered that. It also offered a very serious part of Alcoholics Anonymous – being involved in General Service, which gave me an opportunity to learn more about AA.

One of the things that really drew me to this group – this group always had a greeter. There was always a guy standing at the bottom of the steps to shake your hand, and he could remember names. I don’t know how he did it. The second time I came down here he knew who I was. And then the old-timers would tell me stuff like, “Keep coming back, we need to hear what you have to say.” So I kept coming back.

I loved to sit on the couches by the old-timers like Dale Y. and Dick K., both of whom had many years of sobriety. I liked sitting with them because I thought I was going to get these really deep, wise answers about our problems in life. I thought these guys would really understand this stuff and be able to pass it on. But they just kept it so simple, it was sickening. Stuff like, “If you feel like drinking – don’t”. That was the kind of wisdom I would get.
One night there was a guy sitting down here and he was new and shaking and he stunk. He looked bad and smelled like a drunk. He was a new drunk, and he was shaking one off and had come to this meeting. We were sitting there by him, and we were talking about some step. Those of us who were new were talking about how much we knew about Step Ten and how much it meant, and it came around to one of the guys who had been sober for 15 years. He looked over at the new guy and he said, “You know, since I been coming down here, for 8 months I haven’t had a drink.” The guy looked at him and said, “Wow, you haven’t had a drink for 8 months?” And the old-timer said, “Nope, since I been coming to these meetings I haven’t had a drink for 8 months.”

After the meeting the guy got up and left, and I went over to Dick and said, “Dick, I thought you’ve been sober for 15 years?” And he said, “Yeah, but if I would have told him that he wouldn’t have believed me.”

(Doug – He wanted to keep a low profile (1983)

*From a talk given in 1991*

The first time I came down to a meeting, it was mid April 1983. The few things I remember from my first meeting, how I got to my first meeting – I was asking around – secretly on campus at Carleton – where somebody goes if they think they have a problem with drinking and somebody said, “Well, I heard there’s A.A.”. I said, “oh, well OK”. They said, “I think I know a guy named Mark who goes to A.A. and I’ll give him a call and find out where meetings are.” That’s how I found the way to my first meeting. – by somebody telling me “It meets downtown, below Snyders (Drug Store).” I made sure to ask for directions because as a student on campus you think the whole world revolves around you and that fact that there’s something in town doesn’t cross your mind much.

I came down here (Third Tradition Group), and the first guy I met when I came off the steps was a guy named Pete. He shook my hand and said “Welcome to the Third Tradition Group, coffee is over there, we’ll be getting started in just a moment. There were maybe 6 –12 people down here at that time. The thing I remember most about that is that Pete was
there every week after that as well. It was the one thing I could count on when I came down – there was a guy named Pete and he would shake my hand. That made all the difference to me. I was terrified of coming down and not having anyone to talk to, and I thought – if that happens, I’m going to take off. But he was there every week and shook my hand and said he was glad to see me – so I came in.

Another thing remember about my first meeting, that says a lot about the group, when they were passing the basket for the Seventh Tradition (self-support), it was coming around and I went to throw some money in like everybody else had been doing, and the guy next to me said, “No, don’t throw any money in until you decide this is what you want.” That really made a big impression on me at the time because I thought, “well, they’re not really in it for the money.”

I remember they had the Chip Talk. I don’t know how they knew I was a newcomer, but they had a Chip Talk that night. I didn’t want to get up and get a chip, but somebody elbowed me, so I got up and got one.

When they had a Step Meeting, at least in 1983, somebody would get up and give a two-minute pitch for the Step they were on. They would give the pitch after they had gone through all the other stuff first. After which we would break up into our squads and discuss it. I think it was scarier to sign up to chair a meeting at that time than it is now.

There were a few young guys, Mark, John, Erick and Rob, and Mark and John accosted me after the meeting, asked me if I was an alcoholic, and was I serious, and invited me out to coffee. One other thing I remember is that the meeting officially lasted about an hour, but they all got here about an hour beforehand and sat around and talked, then they had the meeting, and then they moved the meeting out to the Happy Chef, Country Kitchen, whatever it was at the time – it would last that whole time. I didn’t realize that people came early because I came about 7:58. I remember people were real anxious to give me a ride to the meeting – they all wanted to know, “Do you need a ride to the meeting – we’ll get one for you.” Of course, I was eager to say, “No, that’s OK – I’ll walk.” I didn’t want to get too close to these people, I wasn’t to sure I was going to be sticking around.

I was encouraged to buy a Big Book at my second meeting. I said I didn’t have any money, and they said that was OK, just take the book and pay for it next week. I thought – that’s kind of a cheap was to get me
back next week. But that’s what I did. The next week I came back and wrote a check for it.

Sponsorship was strongly encouraged that first year. Everybody kept asking me if I had a sponsor – every week. It was about a month before I picked a sponsor.

On some Saturdays, they used to get together down here and talk about construction. Thinking about what we were going to do (to the meeting rooms), and eating. As a matter of fact, a few years ago a couple of guys and I tried to revive that idea of having breakfast down here on Saturday mornings occasionally. I think we effectively killed that with the waffles I made – I don’t think anybody would come back the next time.

It seemed like there was always talk about construction. At every Group Conscience Meeting somebody would ask if there was any new business and everyone would look around the room for a minute. I remember the heater was a big deal. They were constantly talking about the heater. Later on it was the smoke eater.

It seemed like people got together a lot outside the meetings. In 1983 I didn’t get together with a lot of people. I was still kind of unsure about this, but I remember feeling like I should because everybody else did. I remember biking over to another guys house, because I was pretty nervous, I don’t know about what – but I was pretty nervous, and I went over and they weren’t home, or Dennis wasn’t home – Maggie and Jessica were there, I went in and sat down and kind of was nervous in the kitchen for awhile, they said, “Do you want coffee?” and I said, “No – I was nervous”, and I got up and I left – that seemed to be what I needed.

At the beginning of the Wednesday night meetings people would mention if anybody was sick or in the hospital, I remember going to visit Craig when he was in the hospital, so I mean it seemed like people were in touch a lot outside the meetings.

For those who know me, I now set my sobriety date at January 2, 1984. I haven’t had a drink since I came down to this group in April of ’83. I wasn’t to sure what the Third Tradition was, but I was soon to come to learn about it. I hadn’t been through treatment, and I knew I had a problem with drinking – so I quite drinking, but it seemed like once every couple of months getting stoned would take the edge off things. I t wasn’t something that I talked about with a lot of people in the group – not that
I felt guilty or anything – but people knew. A number of people knew as a matter of fact, and at this time I also started looking around – it never dawned on me that the group was named after a Tradition. Well, the Third Tradition says, “The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking” – and I had that. I didn’t want to drink – I was certain about that! And I didn’t have a problem with smoking pot as far as I could see, so I just didn’t drink.

The interesting thing is that nobody in this group said anything about it. A lot of people knew, but nobody came after me about it. They talked about it when I wasn’t there. The interesting thing is that they put a lot of faith in sticking by certain principles. You know, they kind of set up this group based on principles – and they stuck to them, and one of the was following that tradition. They knew I had a desire to stop drinking, and with that I could keep coming to meetings. Needless to say, I found that if I worked the Steps – it wasn’t necessary to get stoned. As a matter of fact, it’s a lot less illegal. That also made an impression on me.

In 1984, when riding with John to put on a speaker meeting in Hayfield, I found out they had known about my pot use. I asked him, “How come you guys never said anything?” He said, “Well, we figured you’d come around eventually.” They were right – it worked!

Doug was also kind enough to share some general recollections of the group. Here they are:

I remember one day when we had a clean up day down at the TTG and Bill took it upon himself to reverse the posters behind the podium. He thought the 12 Traditions were more important to the life of the group and therefore should be put first (on the left as the audience looks forward) with the 12 Steps on the other side. For years after that, I’d watch speakers turn around to read one of the steps and get thrown off because they were on the other side. I’m not sure if the same order has been retained or not but that’s how it began.

The other memory that includes Bill was the infamous group inventory that took at least six months to complete. As I recall, we called it “Why we do what we do.” Over time, we investigated everything from the way we entered the meeting place to the way we conducted ourselves at coffee afterwards. The structure for the inventory was just to follow everything that happens in a typical meeting night. Many people were frustrated
with how long the inventory took but to this day, it is by far the best group inventory I have ever been a part of.

Two memories include Lenny. The first was his answer to the guy who said he felt that life without alcohol was a fairly monochromatic experience. As I remember, he thumped the table and said, “God damn it, down here we use words everyone can understand.” The other memory has to do with “Nervous Dave”. After a while, we found that whenever we brought up Dave’s name he would show up at the next meeting. One night, after we had mentioned Dave’s name at coffee, Lenny noticed someone skulking in the bushes across the street from Happy Chef. I yelled out, “Dave! You get the hell over here.” At that point, Dave emerged from the bushes and trotted on over. As I recall, we also had Dave on a sugar restriction because otherwise, his coffee was 50% sugar.

A few months ago, I was down at TTG and noticed the sign saying something to the effect of “Your mother doesn’t live here, so clean up after yourself.” I remembered when a sign similar to that first appeared. Jamie had typed it up and hung it after we had a clean up day down there. I think he would have been in his first year of sobriety.

As I think back to early sobriety and my first meetings down there, my memory becomes a little more uncertain. I do remember that during the opening ritual, we used to always ask if there was anyone sick or in the hospital. I remember that because during my first year, Craig was in the hospital for a hernia operation. Wanting to be a part of the group, I took the school shuttle over to the hospital to visit him only to realize once I got there that I didn’t know his last name (I eventually found him by wandering around and looking in rooms).

Probably my favorite memories were the Saturdays we would get together to “work on the group”. Usually began with coffee, doughnuts, and sitting around shooting the breeze and didn’t get much further than that. Later on the workdays were a lot more productive.

There was also the period of time when many members of the group used to get together to play Wallyball down at Olympus on Saturdays. The whole “Northfield Mafia” thing started when Dennis, Mark and John went to an assembly or something down in Owatonna and all of you wore dark suits (I don’t think I was along that time). In fact, for a long
time, I seem to recall it was the norm to wear a tie on Friday nights out of respect for the speaker.

I remember group conscience meetings back in the mid-80’s that would easily go to 11:30pm. We spent years talking about air cleaners and furnaces. Didn’t the Northfield Lady Drunks spin off, due to complaints about the smoke, right after we got an air cleaner? I seem to remember some sort of connection there but maybe not.


I spent most of January of ’84 in a treatment center, and went to a couple of different groups when I got out of there. The one main thing I learned there was that if I was going to stay sober I needed to attend meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous regularly.

I started attending meetings in the Cities, and I’m very grateful to the one meeting that I went to – not because it was a great meeting, because I didn’t think it was – but they had an open speaker meeting and they invited one of the members from here to come up and speak and he came up there and told his story and I really liked what he had to say.

Right after the meeting I went up and talked to him about it and he said he was from Northfield and that they had a meeting down here. I found out where the meetings were - but I was kind of shocked about it because I didn’t think Northfield was big enough to have it’s own meetings.

The first time I came down here it was on a Wednesday night, I came walking down those stairs and I really didn’t know what to expect. I had gone tot his drug store for years and didn’t realize there was a door off to the side of the entryway. Anyway, I came down here and looked around, and by golly there was a whole bunch of guys I used to drink with down here. I felt like I was at home the very first meeting. The funny part was that the last time I had seen a couple of these guys - they weren’t in very good shape the last time I had seen them – they were sitting on the couches
back there and laughing and joking and having a good time – and I thought there must be something here that works.

The first few weeks I got here a little bit late, but I stuck around after the meeting for a little while and talked to a few people. The one guy, I remember, I stood down after the meeting on Monday night, there was probably six of us, and I started telling Jake the same story I told everybody in treatment – I was rattling off all this stuff, and he said, “Do you have a sponsor?” I said, “Kind of.” And he said, “Well, I think you should get one, because I really don’t want to hear all this.”

I was pretty sure that I knew everything already because of all the education I had gotten in the month of January, and I knew things were better because I wasn’t spending so much at the bar, although I didn’t realize I should be paying bills with that money instead of buying cars and all that stuff, so I was kind of crazy there for the first, well maybe, three or four years.

I kept coming down here and started going to three meetings a week, the Big Book meeting on Monday nights – sometimes there weren’t a whole lot of people there, but I sure got a lot out of it. The guys a sponsor now – it seems like things always come back to me that we’ve studied in the Big Book, and I can tell them where to find it in the Big Book.

Sponsorship was very encouraged by this group, eventually I did get a sponsor down here - I think it took me about nine months – and then it was because somebody offered. I don’t think I really needed one, but they must have known something I didn’t know.

One thing I really liked was the structure of the group and the way they kept things on track. I had been to some other meetings where somebody would be whining about how their day was and that person would talk the whole meeting. There wasn’t much talk about the solution – a lot of talk about the problem – and that’s what I liked about this meeting was that there was a lot of talk about the solution and a lot of talk about their experience with the Steps and the Traditions.

That’s one thing that was new to me was the Traditions, I never heard anything about that before I came down here. I think it’s an important part of sobriety. I was encouraged to stay after the meeting for the Group Conscience Meeting. I was kind of amazed at how they came to some of the decisions, it wasn’t anything I thought they should do, but somehow
after it was all talked out and the way things were decided – it turned out for the best anyway.

I remember one Group Conscience meeting we were having – I think it was the first year I was down here – It was about the American flag. That was a heck of a meeting! That lasted for about an hour just on the topic of whether or not we should have a flag down here. Anyway, we decided that we didn’t want to offend anybody and that it really didn’t have anything much to do with Alcoholics Anonymous, as such, so we decided not to have it – even though it might have been a good thing, I thought, it got shot down. It always seemed like even one person could change the opinion of the Group Conscience and it always worked out for the best.

After six months I was elected as the Treasurer, and that really amazed me because I had a terrible time balancing my own checkbook at the time. But they gave me some responsibility, and it felt good to do that.

One that really scared to death was to stand up in front and talk to a group of people – I could never do that before. Just to get up here and chair a meeting, it was neat how they had a different chairperson every week.

I feel I owe an awful lot to this group – I could probably go on a long time about different things I learned here.

Loren – Quickly in & Quickly out (1985)

When I first came down here, it wasn’t my first time in A.A – but I sure was nervous. I think I got here about 5 minutes after the meetings started – and at 9:00 I was running out the door. I really didn’t hang around too much.

The thing that I remember about my first meeting was that it was a First Step meeting, and I thought that I must be pretty important for them to have a First Step meeting just for me. There were a couple of young guys there, and I identified with them pretty good. They had all the problems – like girls – that made sense to me.
I think I came down here the first night on a Monday night and they told me to come back on a Wednesday night. I sat out in my car until about 8:00 or 8:00 and I was so scared that I didn’t even go in there. I learned later that they knew I was sitting out there.

Right away they got on me about sponsorship – they kept asking me if I had a sponsor – so I asked this guy to be my sponsor, and then I got another one. We got together occasionally and had coffee and stuff like that. I didn’t know anything about A.A. or service or anything, so I stumbled into a pretty good group – I was lucky that way.

Rick -He didn’t know what he was getting into (1986)

I was an hour early for my first meeting – thanks to the court system. Dale was down making coffee – he was the first person I met from this group. I don’t remember a thing he said, but I know I was here from about 7:00 pm until 10:00 pm that night. It seemed like Dale was talking to me the whole time.

That was on a Monday night and I had just come out of the thirty-day “spin-dry” (treatment) and I was really confused. All I knew was that the courts system said I had to come down here - and I was coming.

It was January – it was cold – I had spent November in a sleeping bag on the back of my bike, and I wanted to get back in the house with my wife, and I just wanted to make things work. (That’s probably the first time I’ve been totally honest)

They told me I had to come to at least two meetings a week - the first one was Monday night, the second one was Wednesday. They told me I had to get a sponsor.

The first Monday night I couldn’t remember anything, but Wednesday night when I came down I knew I was going to ask about a sponsor. I didn’t know anybody on Monday, and when I came down on Wednesday
I came down right at 8:00 because I knew that’s when the meeting was. The first person I met was Lenny – and I knew Lenny. The first thing I said to him was, “How long you been sober?” I had to have a sponsor with some length of sobriety, and he said he had been sober a couple of years – so I asked him to be my sponsor. I didn’t know what I was getting myself into.

Lenny had a way of doing things like, after I had been down here a couple of months (I couldn’t get up in front of people and talk) Lenny said, “Did you see who was signed up for the Wednesday meeting?” I said, “No.” And he said, “I think you better take a look.” He had signed me up.

Lenny was the GSR (Group Service Representative) for this group when I came in, and he used to drag me to everything. I remember one time he was speaking down in Rochester, and we went down there, and we were running kind of late and were in a hurry, and we really didn’t look at the addresses on these buildings, and just saw a whole bunch of cars in a parking lot, and Lenny said, “This has got to be it.” So we pull in there, and we jump out of the car and we’re heading for the front door and just before we go in the front door, I looked in there and I said, “Lenny, I don’t think this is it.” It was a union meeting and there were pitchers of beer sitting on the tables.

I don’t know when things started changing around for me. In my earlier sobriety I did what anybody told me to do, I didn’t know anything, I just did what anybody said. Things really went well for me. I think it was much easier then, than it is now.

\textbf{Tom – He tried it his way (1987)}

I looked up the group in the local newspaper and came down here. When I came, a guy named Harold shook my hand and he was smiling – right away I thought there was something wrong here. So I dropped out and went drinking for another three years.

Three years later, when I came back, there he was again. He shook my hand and said, “I knew you’d be coming back.” I was going to treatment at the time and then coming here, and I had just
had enough – I was ready to sober up. The whole thing about it is that it’s
easier to quit drinking, but living sober – that’s the hard part.

When I first came down here, they put me in a beginners meeting and
asked me if I wanted a sponsor. That’s why I had trouble staying sober
the first time – I was doing everything my way. So I gave up and got a
temporary sponsor – and he sure helped me out.

Just coming up front and chairing meetings – I didn’t like that. I said
there was no way I was going to get up and chair a meeting, or read How
It Works. And it seemed they pushed the Steps on you – now I understand
that I can’t live a happy life sober without them.

I quit this group for a while – I thought I wasn’t getting what I needed –
I wanted some room. So I went to a different meeting and it seemed that
they were always either talking about their problems or crying around
the table – but I did find what I was looking for, but I was just miserable.

So I figured I’d give this group one more shot. So I came back and got a
new sponsor. I’ve had four or five sponsors – they were always right, it’s
just that whenever they told me the truth – I’d get a new sponsor. Honesty
is a big part in A.A. and this group has taught me to be honest with
myself.

When I came down they were saying the Lords Prayer, I like that – they
could have held hands too, that would have been OK with me – but at the
time they switched it to “I Am Responsible”, and now I like that a lot
better now because you’ve got to be responsible if you’re going to stay
sober.

Denise - Saved at last! (1988)

When asked to share about my experience
and thoughts on Third Tradition Group, I
was delighted. In short, the Third Tradition
Group saved my life. When I came to this
group in March 1988, they had 3 meetings a
week. I attended all three on a regular basis.
Monday night was a Big Book discussion,
Wednesday night was a step/tradition meeting and Friday night was a
newcomer’s meeting with an open speaker meeting to follow.
I remember my first meeting, being frightful walking down those long, steep steps into the basement of Snyder Village Drugstore. As I turned the corner, I saw an open room with tables lined up such as you would see in a church basement. I must have looked lost, because a member named Lenny motioned for me to have a seat at his table. I was never so grateful for his kindness.

There were not many women when I came down, I remember 3 women attending regularly. After about 6 months, I made up the third regular. But I remember this did not intimidate me. The men at the meeting were very welcoming.

To chair a meeting on Wednesday night, you stood behind a podium. I remember thinking that you must really be somebody to be able to chair a meeting and have the nerve to get behind the podium. But I came to believe that anyone in AA whether one day sober or 10 years sober was somebody, and it was just a few months later, I was behind the podium.

It was a long time before I attended the group conscience meetings. A member by the name of Tom would ask me each month, (group conscience meetings were the first Wednesday of the month) if I would like to stay. I gave the excuse that my husband is expecting me home. After a few months, Tom got smarter and told me the week before so could let my husband know. The next meeting I stayed. The group conscience meeting brought to me a whole new look at AA. I was not aware that there was more to AA than my own safe group. The group’s makeup was very committed to service. They talked about a district, area and world service in New York! Because of the strong commitment the group had for service, I learned a lot. It comforted me to know that there were recovering alcoholics willing to give more of their time than just to meetings for the success of AA.

About every year or two we would have a meeting room workday. We taped, painted, carpeted, and built more private meeting rooms in the large basement space. We would be as frugal as possible, but still remain self-supporting. My sister’s old living room carpet is still in the women’s bathroom. The group had real pride in their meeting place. I did have some concern about the color blue, which was chosen for one wall behind the beloved podium, but now I could not imagine it being any other color.
Over the years more women came, younger people from the colleges joined us. Our fellowship came and went. But because of the strong love for the “meat” of the program, I learned from this group the importance of AA approved literature, sponsorship, and not watering down the program. There are only the 12 steps of recovery; there are not 1 or 8, but 12 and this group hits to home that the whole program is needed for peace, serenity and sobriety.

I was a home group member of the Third Tradition Group for 12 years. They are memorable years and I would not trade them for the world. I will always look with fondness upon this group. As I said earlier this group saved my life. I would like to thank the founders of this group for being there for me when I was new and scared. But God has since called me to other paths in my sobriety and even though I fought for well over a year, God won and I moved on.

The Third Tradition Group is now about 20 years old. That speaks for itself of the love and service that is given from the hundreds of alcoholics that came down those long steps in the basement of a drug store. May God continue to govern this group and bless every alcoholic walking down those steps with peace, serenity, love and the willingness to get involved with a home group that has the love for the program that the Third Tradition Group has.

Samira – She was on a search (1988)

My first visit to the Third Tradition Group was at eleven months of sobriety. I was speaking outside of my home group for the first time. I thought I knew all the answers needed for sobriety. Even so, coming to Third Tradition Group was intimidating. Many of the group members were well known throughout the area, serving in various leadership positions. My own home group was in Faribault at the time, and the Third Tradition Group was known somewhat tongue in cheek as the “mother group”.

I came back to the group a year later. By this time I had been sober long enough to realize that I didn’t know all the answers, and that if I didn’t
find some kind of solution quickly I was going to go nuts. I was looking for a sponsor, as my first sponsor had decided to seek solutions outside of AA. My first impressions were good. An energetic woman greeted me warmly as soon as I walked down the stairs. I was impressed to learn that she had only three months of sobriety. My social skills hadn’t developed quite that rapidly!

The group members were obviously serious about sobriety, and they were enthusiastic about keeping their service commitments: putting on AA meetings at the county jail, giving Alcoholics Anonymous informational talks at treatment facilities, and speaking at various service engagements. Apathy was unknown. At group elections, several people indicated willingness to stand for elected positions. We used the third legacy procedure and names often went to the hat.

The group discussions revealed that the members practiced the principles outside of AA as well. I heard many different personal experiences of how the steps had changed their lives. This sharing gave me hope. I had been working through the steps, but I knew that I was pretending to be what I thought a good AA should be most of the time. I needed to have that psychic change referred to in the Big Book.

Group members talked about God and stressed the spiritual aspect of the program freely. No one seemed ashamed of their dependence on a power greater than themselves. On the contrary, living a life based on a relationship with God has been the primary aim of group members.

I found a sponsor from Third Tradition and within a few months I made it my home group. I began working the steps with my sponsor in earnest. The group provided a convenient private meeting place on Thursday nights. We spent many hours there as we completed an exhaustive survey of my past. Like other alcoholics, I had many resentments and fears, but the most troublesome was the deep-seated bitterness I had for God. Slowly I began to experience a release from these feelings.

I particularly enjoyed the “meeting after the meeting”. On Mondays and Wednesdays we went to Happy Chef, many times staying until the wee hours of the morning. On Friday we went to Bill’s Pizza Palace. Bill’s finally had to establish a closing time of 2 a.m., just to get us out of there at a decent time. We talked about everything connected to AA at these
meetings and laughter abounded. We had our favorite waitresses: Robin at Bill’s and Kathy at Happy Chef. Kathy would set up our tables on Mondays and Wednesdays to prepare for our arrival. The restaurants eventually realized what organization we belonged to. After one particularly frustrating evening with a rowdy table in the corner, Robin approached us and demanded that we “recruit” that rowdy bunch!

I learned many lessons at our group conscience meetings. I was amazed to see the more experienced members of the group sit back and let a conscience develop without forcing their own ideas. Not all of our exchanges at these meetings could be considered loving. I’ve always enjoyed a good fight; so heated discussions did not bother me. I learned to put principals before personalities, and that God’s will for our group was expressed during these meetings, no matter which personalities were involved.

The group has now become part of my extended family. We have our occasional squabbles, but a spirit of love and cooperation enables us to see beyond individual differences and to maintain the unity needed for our survival.

Mike – Home at last! (1989)

I originally came down to the group some time in September. My first meeting was on a Wednesday night. I found out about it from Denise. I had forgotten what time the meeting started. I showed up about 9:15 pm or so. I asked a couple of guys in the parking lot if the meeting had started – they said it was over. But I was tired of drinking and really wanted to stop.

So I went down the stairs anyway. I looked around and saw a bunch of young guys and immediately went over and started talking to them. They were real gracious and introduced me to just about everybody in the room.

So my official first meeting was on the following Friday. I can’t remember who the speaker was, but I can remember thinking, “How does he know?”
He did the same things I did, felt the same way, it just really hit home that I was in the right place.

After the meeting I talked with a real good member of this group, and we sat and talked and I told him all this stuff – and he didn’t seem too impressed with it, and there was this monster of a fellow standing over by the coffee pot. And he said, “Well, let’s go over and talk to Dave.” (Dave wasn’t a member of the group, but came over from Faribault for the Friday meetings) Dave started talking to me about the fact that alcohol wasn’t the problem – I couldn’t figure out what he was talking about. I thought, “What do you mean, alcohol not the problem – of course it’s the problem.” He just went on about this for almost a half an hour. So I just nodded and agreed with him until he was done.

It was nice that there were younger people down here because it made me feel more comfortable. I came to meeting for about three or four months until Doug came up to me one day and asked if I had a sponsor. I told him, “No.” He said, “I’m going to be your temporary sponsor.” And I said, “Great.”

My sponsor was real involved in the group and A.A, and so I got involved too. That has really been a good experience for me. It has made a big difference is my ability to stay sober.

Ron – There were some things he didn’t like (1990)

I first came down here in June of 1990. The first thing I noticed were the Beginner Meetings – and I didn’t like them. So I went back out and drank for a few more months.

Finally I wound up in treatment, and then down here. I still didn’t like the Beginners Meetings when I came back. But I stuck around and gradually began to be able to have my life come back together.

Funny thing is – now I take my turn at chairing the Beginner Meetings and I really enjoy that.
My name is Patty, and I am an alcoholic. I came into Alcoholics Anonymous, via the Third Tradition Group of Northfield, MN, in April of 1990.

I am so extremely grateful that in August of 1982, six men listened to that talk by Paul M., mentioned in our history, and decided to form a group. It is because of their decision that I was able to come into a group of Alcoholics Anonymous that was not diluted with other forms of therapies and self-help. Eight years after the formation of the group, the Third Tradition Group, was still a group that dealt with alcoholism only, conveying the message through the principles and traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. This is exactly what I needed; because what was necessary for me was help with my alcoholism. Without “the language of the heart” that was spoken within meetings, I would never have stayed sober. I had already read volumes of self-help books, tried religion, counseling, and will power—all had failed me, and only caused more confusion as to what was wrong with me, and what to do about it.

At my very first meeting at the Third Tradition Group, I was greeted at the door, given coffee, offered a newcomer’s meeting, got a copy of the Big Book, assigned a temporary sponsor, and told to keep coming back. Yes, I had to become willing; but the sincerity and understanding that was evident and expressed that night convinced me to try.

The attitudes and hospitality of the group members gave me the incentive I needed to become willing to do what was suggested—to try something one more time. I could hear and feel, from those initial group contacts, this “something” was different then just self-knowledge. People spoke about a solution by a program of action. They talked about themselves—not me—and how the “program” worked for them. They didn’t push me to do anything but perhaps try what had worked for them. I knew one of the most important things they had done was something called sponsorship. I was given a very strong sense of pursuing this “sponsor thing” right from the first meeting.

It was also made clear to me, very early on, that it was important to know what it was that I belonged to. I was invited, and taken to, service
functions outside of my own group—giving me not only the blessing of ending my own isolation, but in seeing the importance of those who were willing to sacrifice time and effort to keep Alcoholics Anonymous alive for those future members, who would need exactly what I had found.

The Third Tradition Group has provided the place and atmosphere I needed, and continue to need, in my sobriety. It has not always been comfortable. Many times personalities get in the way of principles; friendships begin and end; fellow members drink and leave—or die. Through it all, the pure program of the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous that this group stands on, has been passed on and understood by a few core members, who need it enough and become committed enough, to make sure it continues. The core members vary and change because of various reasons; but one thing that the principles that the Third Tradition Group has given through its practices, is that it continues to produce enough members who find the courage to depend on a God of their own understanding, whose guidance they follow in carrying the message to others; and that keeps this thing we call Alcoholics Anonymous, alive and available, for those who will someday “trudge the road of happy destiny” with us.

Like alcohol—my relationship with the group was not to be a

Niles - He had a plan - 1990

Like alcohol—my relationship with the group was not to be a lasting one—just something I’d do or try, get what I needed and then be on my way. I thought I’d give it a try for five years and if it worked, Fine!—if not, there were always other options. What I wanted to work was: Life happening for me, in the way that I thought it should.

This man I’d called wanting some direction to an A.A. meeting, picked me up, and along with two other men brought me to The Third Tradition Group on a Wednesday night. No one was very talkative or friendly on the way to the meeting; but then one was fairly mousey; the other a tank-topped, zuba pants wearing, shade wearing twenty year old;
and, of course, the guy I’d call, a red neck cowboy. Definitely people with whom I would not mix! But, at least I was on my way.

My thought as I entered the group was “this is a fairly ratty place, but then what could one expect from a bunch of drunks”. I had seen bars with the lights turned up and they weren’t very different then what I saw here at The Third Tradition Group. So—no big deal! I was told that they would have a Newcomer’s Meeting for me and I know the man who brought me and may be one or two others joined him in the room where the telephone is. I don’t remember a whole lot about that meeting except one fact; and that is that many times throughout the meeting I heard laughter, loud laughter, coming from the other rooms. I knew they were all laughing at me. This was humiliating, but what the heck. I also was sure that they were drinking—for why else would they be laughing and having a good time, of course, at my expense? However, when my Newcomer’s Meeting was over and we went out into the main room, I was amazed to see how quickly they had hidden the booze—for no one was drinking! The man who had brought me said I should buy a Big Book and a Twelve by Twelve—which I did. I then picked up some other literature that I thought might be helpful for my wife (I knew she was an alcoholic).

Before I was dropped off, the man who brought me mentioned that since I’d called, he offered to be my temporary sponsor. After a question and answer session on sponsorship, I thanked him and accepted his offer. It seemed to me I could control this sponsorship thing, so it was worth a try.

Then came what I believe was my first attempt of seeking some guidance—I was told that the only thing I could do about it was pray. Looking back on what happened to me, and what goes on today 12 plus years later, it’s pretty much the same. The message carried then by a home group member worked for me then. I see no reason it doesn’t work now. Nothing overly profound—just a solution for a disease that makes it difficult for the alcoholic to deal with life’s problems as they manifest themselves.

I’ve watched us as a group try to utilize non-rotation; I’ve watched us as a group be so involved in general service that we forgot the importance of carrying the message at home; I’ve watched us try to carry the message to only one person to the detriment of the whole; and yet as any viable group will, we have survived and grown to keeping it simple and always trying as best as possible to adhere to the group conscience, where everyone has a voice that is considered. Our problems as a group
have always been when we have not had an informed group conscience, or we as individual group members have thought we need not be accountable or responsible for the message that I’ve come to believe has helped me to find a happier, more joyous, freer life then when King Alcohol was in control.

Lois – She found alcohol to be cunning, baffling, and powerful (1991)

On a cold Friday in January 1991 my family sat down to one of our favorite meals - pot roast. In my drunkenness I proceeded to pour straight grease on the potatoes instead of the expected gravy. I guess my husband thought this would be a good time to let me know that my brother had called him about a month before to tell him that my siblings were concerned about my drinking. We’d only been back in Minnesota for five months and none of them even live in Northfield. Yet, my drinking was at that stage where even distance couldn’t hide the fact that it was way out of control.

Instead of being grateful for their concern, I was mad and scared. Later that night, now even more drunk, I looked up the number of Alcoholics Anonymous and phoned. I called during the Friday night speaker meeting and talked with a woman named Monica. She told me a little about herself and we agreed to meet for lunch a few days later. I didn’t drink in the meantime, met her for lunch and was given a used Big Book. I took it home and read it cover to cover several times, but took pains to see that no one saw me reading it.

For six weeks I just didn’t drink. I didn’t get in touch with anyone from AA. I didn’t go to meetings. I just didn’t drink. They were the worst weeks of my life, including and up to this day. I hated almost anyone
who showed any concern for me. And, of course, I drank again. I drank for about one more month.

During that month, once again very drunk on a Friday night, I called AA. This time Monica came to my house and got to see me in action. We began to meet even though I continued to drink. Finally on April 25 I had what I hope was my last drink. But still would not go to meetings. I met with Monica almost every week during the summer and into the fall. We began to read the Big Book together and I even started doing the steps. It’s probably not a coincidence that I finally came to a closed meeting while beginning to look at fears.

My first meeting was in November and we were on the third step. I don’t remember a thing that was said, except I knew that I was in the midst of something different. A world that I never knew existed. A world I belonged to.

Since then I have rarely missed a Wednesday or Friday meeting, and have become a fairly active member. I don’t like basements, I don’t smoke, I don’t like rooms without windows. Yet, I keep coming back because I have found answers that work, people who remind me of myself or remind me of where I’ll be if don’t take action and practice gratitude. I sat in meetings for six months before I ever noticed the huge banner that hangs in the Third Tradition room - ATTITUDE + GRATITUDE = RECOVERY. Today I am still often blind to the basics, but I belong to a group that will and has on many occasions brought me back to the basics.

Mary Lou – She overcame her fear (1993)

The memory of my first year of sobriety is hazy. I do know that I first walked into the Third Tradition Group terrified – but a numbed kind of terrified because I wanted anything other that what I had been living.

The past few years I was a drowning person in a sea of resentments and all the other lifesavers sent to me were waterlogged and pulling me down. So I hesitatingly reached out to A.A. After that first night something was different. A hope none of the other methods held. Retrospectively now, I know I belonged and felt an association.
It was a love-hate relationship. I’d come to one meeting a week (recommended by treatment), and I got a sponsor (also recommended by treatment). I didn’t trust her – but after she told me about her experience I felt safer than I’d ever felt before (I didn’t know how to say that at the time, but inside I knew). So I kept coming back. It worked through all the pain I was feeling now, not drinking.

I slept through Friday night meetings what I started coming to them. That was better than feeling useless or angry or resentful or anything else at home. It seemed to be a lighter atmosphere at meetings and I felt comfortable. (Obviously, since I slept)

When I started going to Group Conscience meetings, I was terrified – it was like sitting at dinner as a child. Opinions were expressed – occasionally loudly. But I stayed. It was familiar, and people usually resolved things without too much animosity it seemed. They still talked to each other later or at the next meeting – that was helpful.

So for the first time I felt like I belonged even though I didn’t want to belong to this group. It did something for me that nothing else in 15 years of searching ever did. It helped me make sense out of the hatred I felt for God and myself and has changed that to love for God, my fellow man and myself.

Missy – She was confused (1997)

When the group was first asked to submit their recollections of when they first came here, I really had to think about that because things were really fuzzy for me when I came down those stairs – in fact my sponsor had to correct me on our first encounter.

Fresh out of treatment, a mere 6 hours, I really didn’t want to come that night in 1997, but I had been “coaxed” by my new temporary sponsor who was a home group member. I remember coming down the stairs, scared to death, and two or three
guys were standing there greeting people as they came. As I finished shaking hands, the woman who was to become my sponsor was right there with a handshake for me. And I was home.

It was a Step/Tradition meeting that night followed by a Group Conscience meeting. I didn’t want to leave after the regular meeting, as I was scared of what was beyond the doorway. But once again, my sponsor stepped in and told me to go spend the much-needed time with my children.

This group has taught me how to stay sober and live sober. Through the leadership of the Third Tradition Group and the sponsorship the group promotes I have learned to practice the spiritual principles of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is because of this that I have found gratitude in living.

Greg – He thought he’d find a doctor. (1999)

My awakening started, literally, on a sleepy Sunday morning with the friendly sun filtering in through the bedroom window. Lacy white Victorian curtains were dancing like ghosts, billowing in front of a slightly opened window and an unseasonably warm December breeze.

I felt downright fine as I shook off my slumber and wondered why my wife wasn’t answering the rudely ringing telephone. “Must be in the shower or making breakfast,” I thought as I rose from bed to take the call. To my utter astonishment, the voice on the other end of the receiver was my wife’s. It was sharp and panicked. She was less than happy that I had not returned the previous night from my excursion to the bar, leaving her and my children at a friend’s place in another town. The only recollection I could muster was a dizzy, spotlight-focus on yellow highway stripes as they sailed by - that is how I’d driven the 20 miles home in a blackout. The heat was on.

A few minutes later I was pulling on clothes to rush off and retrieve my family from where they’d been left, when I got another call. It was my
brother in-law — the one who graduated from cocaine addiction treatment. He coldly growled that I needed help. Now. If I didn’t get it, he promised to personally take my children away from me. That was it. I broke down. I confessed in bitter tears that I had no defense. It was pointed out that there was a number for Alcoholics Anonymous in the Northfield phone book. Convinced that I simply couldn’t control my drinking problem on my own, I dialed it.

Only later did I appreciate it was something of a small miracle that a fellow alcoholic answered that early Sunday afternoon call in person. Niles informed me that I could attend the group’s next closed meeting – on Monday night. I was in shock. I had assumed that dutiful men in white coats would spring up immediately and drag me to a meeting within the hour! I would have to survive the next 33 hours in my scrambled condition. I vaguely remember it as a rather extremely long couple of days.

On Monday night I found the Third Tradition Monday night AA meeting. I had no real or even secondhand exposure to AA previously, and wondered if there was some relation to Triple-A. Perhaps drunks could get volume discounts on towing services?

I remember trying so hard to tread lightly down the painfully-loud creaking and groaning steps leading to the Third Tradition dungeon – vainly trying not to draw attention to myself. I was certain that those screaming steps had been rigged to announce a new lamb being led to slaughter.

Deathly afraid of being recognized, I was greatly relieved that I wasn’t. The people there seemed absurdly happy. Excited conversations and uproarious guffaws filled the basement air – a direct contrast to my dark mood. Big Joe jumped up to obliterate the sanctity of my personal space and shook my hand with the enthusiasm you’d use to kill a snake. He was chewing tobacco back then and a few tiny brown missiles jettisoned onto my cheeks as he joyously extolled the virtues of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous without reservation. He sought me out and greeted me with gusto at every one of my first AA meetings, and it helped save my life.

At my newcomer meeting, Niles and Mark put me at ease with the candor of their own stories. I remember asking if I should take some time off from my work to re-establish some better emotional footing. It threw
me for a total loop when it was suggested that, no, that would be an unfair burden on my employer who is counting on my labor.

I was encouraged to not drink, attend as many meetings as I could, read the Big Book, and get a sponsor. So I did. And it helped save my life.

Brian and Scott extended their ears and allowed me to whine and gnash my teeth during my many struggling times. I heard things like “Greg, your brain is a fun thing to have around, but it isn’t necessarily your best friend.” And “just because you think something, doesn’t mean you have to believe it!” Once I might have said I was just that stubborn, now I think I was just that sick.

Also unforgettable was the meeting that served as a mini-intervention regarding my secret marijuana maintenance program. I had puffed up my pride about a year of “not-drinking.” However, I got an unexpected Saturday morning visit from Mike after I’d just completed a large joint. He excused himself promptly and fled. In the squad meeting of my next AA meeting, stern statements about how “sobriety was different than not drinking,” and that “true sobriety was abstinence from ALL mood-altering substances” seemed to pour out, directed at me with gazing eyes. Prior to that my “don’t ask, don’t tell” program preserved the last bastion of non-surrender. Among the serious but caring faces there were Denise and Patti and Mary Lou. It had to be directly suggested that I not smoke pot before it would occur to me. They helped save my life.

I perhaps have derived the most from those contemporary alcoholics who first attempted putting principles into action about the same time I did. Missy and Doug and Martin clearly were getting better. I watched sometimes in desperate frustration. But I also thought that perhaps, I too could get better. Thanks to you!

Over the past few years I have found refuge in the Third Tradition Group. My warped perspective has often been gently redirected through the observations of AA veterans like Dennis, Lois, Jake, Dave and others.

Many alcoholics newer to recovery have given me great sustenance. I have learned that an alcoholic can get sober and stay sober no matter what happens in their world. We don’t have to struggle alone. That a modest amount of consecutive sober days – but more than I once thought possible.
At Third Tradition, there are many living inspirations of damaged lives courageously healed, and of a developed respect for a frighteningly deadly disease. There were two occasions I had the privilege to help “fix up” our meeting space, but it is the progress of imperfect people that continually amazes me and keeps me coming back. I’m still killing old unworkable ideas, and growing.

Lately I attend lots of AA meetings at lots of different groups, but the Third Tradition Group is where I beat the enormous odds to get sober, and it will always have a special place in my gratitude prayer.

Mary - It was all about getting involved - 2001

My God works in mysterious ways! Once I got home from treatment, I thought it was very important to go to as many meetings as I could, yet give my children the quality time they deserved. Every chance I had, I went to a different AA meeting – Owatonna, Faribault and Kenyon. I also found a job during this time, so I’d say my plate was full and I was on the road to recovery.

One day a nice man came up to me after one of these meetings I attended and gave me his sisters’ name and number. I looked down and the name was my supervisor at work! I had already thought of this woman as a very hardworking, energetic and caring person – but now I knew I wanted what she had!

It took me a couple of weeks to muster up enough courage to talk to her about A.A. But I finally did. Missy offered to take me to her meeting in Northfield. Then she asked me the dreaded question, “Do you have a sponsor?” My answer back was one that many in A.A. have heard before, “No, I just haven’t found that special person.”

She took me to the Friday Newcomers Meeting and we stayed for the Speaker Meeting. Afterwards, on our way to Bill’s Pizza for pizza, I asked Patty to be my sponsor. I don’t remember much about that evening
except being impressed with Missy & Doug in the Newcomers Meeting and being nervous, but grateful, that Patty agreed to be my sponsor.

I became a home group member of the Third Tradition Group very quickly. Probably because I needed a place to belong. Yet, in the beginning I was very shy and uncomfortable around the Fellowship. I never knew what to say to anyone, so I stuck close to Patty and Missy.

Becoming involved is what broke the ice! First, I became Group Secretary, which not only made me accountable at meetings; it forced me to talk in front of the group. Then I began to participate on a smaller level. By helping Patty and Niles with the Pigeon (Area 36 newsletter) mailings, helping do some repair work downstairs at the group and doing my share at the Wednesday Clean-Up night.

The more I contributed, the more comfortable I became. I started to enjoy speaking at Detox and Family Focus (treatment center). Also, being a part of the anniversary celebration (speaker on the sponsorship panel) was wonderful!

I have been coming to the Third Tradition Group for a little more than one year! When I walk down those steps, I know for certain that there will be a hand full of people – sometimes more – to greet me and say welcome! I am not uncomfortable and shy any longer. Those feelings have been replaced with friendship and gratitude.

The Third Tradition Group means a lot to me. I have met people that share the same plight as I do. I am not alone anymore. They understand, relate and give me hope! Thank you Third Tradition Group!

“. . .Among them you will make lifelong friends. You will be bound to them with new and wonderful ties, for you will escape disaster together and you will commence shoulder to shoulder your common journey. Then you will know what it means to give of yourself that others may survive and rediscover life. . ."
There is a quote in *AA Comes of Age* that truly exemplifies what the founders sought when starting the Third Tradition Group. It can be found on page 276 of that wonderful book and goes like this:

*Three conditions are necessary for true fellowship: The possession of a common ideal involving a complete release from selfishness and division. The discharge of a common task big enough to capture the imagination and give expression to loyalty. And the comradeship, the “togetherness,” thus involved as we find out the joy and power of belonging to an organic society and engaging in whole-time service. We can find it at its fullest extent where the ideal is highest and most exacting, where the task extends and integrates every ounce of our strength and every element of our being, where the comradeship is so solid and deep that we respond one to another without conscious effort, realize the unspoken need, and react to it spontaneously and at once.*

**The main point**

The central point upon which the Third Tradition Group was formed was to provide the newcomer the *very best introduction to the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous*. This differs from the often-heard idea that “a resentment and a coffee pot is all that is required to start a group.” As a matter of fact, the start of the group was slowed because of a concern that the ideas held by the founders were not entirely correct. It was only after hearing a speaker at the Southern Minnesota Conference (a roundup that no longer exists) that they felt they had a realistic understanding of what A.A. had to offer, how it could best be presented to the newcomer, and the impact it could have on an alcoholic’s life. Therefore, what drove the formation and early development of the group was not “how can we have it our way”, but rather a case of “how can we ensure that everyone, ourselves included, has access to all A.A. has to offer?”
Squads
The idea of “squads” began in the Third Tradition Group when the group grew to a size that did not allow for everyone to have time to share within the normal 1-hour meeting. The word “squads” was taken from the description of AA’s beginnings within the Oxford Groups. When the alcoholics got to be numerous enough, they became known as the “alcoholic squadron”.

It was believed that beginning together would foster a sense of group unity, and dividing into squads for discussion would allow for adequate time for everyone to participate.

It was also decided that each person was to be free to decide which squad he/she wished to participate in (this was before non-smoking became an issue in many groups). A member could be in a squad with their sponsor, in order to gain more insight into how they worked the Steps; or they could migrate to different squads over a period of time, getting a sense of how a wide variety of people applied the Steps to their lives. After non-smoking squads came into existence, the squads were divided along those lines. Members are still free to attend any of the squads – smokers can attend the non-smoking squad(s), provided they don’t smoke during the meeting.

Why we “go around the table”
It was important that this group return to another of the Oxford Group principles – each person’s experience is just that – their experience – and therefore it is as valuable as anyone else’s, and should not be subject to debate, correction, or comment.

By progressively going around the table, each person could listen to others (not needing to plan their own comments) because they would know when it was their turn to share. The practice, it was thought, would also underscore the idea that each person’s experience was valuable.

It was also thought that this would help avoid the development of a “pecking order” which would work against the idea of equality. Each person if free to glean from the sharing what they believe will work for them. This also helps keep us from dogma and the idea that one member is more ‘qualified’ than another.
**Why we don’t have “cross-talk”**

Several of the founders had experienced the negative impact of this prior to starting the Third Tradition Group. In one case, a member had shared their experience in a meeting and this sharing had been critiqued by the other members in the meeting, which resulted in that member who had originally shared throwing a cigarette lighter at another member, leaving the meeting, and immediately checking into a psychiatric facility.

Therefore, it was decided that each member should be able to share without the fear of begin criticized or critiqued. It was also believed that this would help make the point that a member ought **not** depend on the group to offer advice. That was to be left to the person’s sponsor and their God.

**Sponsorship**

It was believed that one needed a sponsor to begin to work the Steps. In an analogy borrowed from a talk by the “Home Brewmeister”, in the Big Book - if a person bought a new automobile, but didn’t know how to drive it, wouldn’t they arrange to have someone teach them? Beginning to work AA’s Twelve Steps was thought to be the same kind of thing – we needed someone who had been through them to help us learn how to practice them.

This group also encouraged its members to do their Fifth Step with their sponsor. While this was not a common practice in AA in Minnesota when the group began, it has become somewhat of a group standard as of this printing. This does **not** mean a person must do so – it simply has been the group experience that this works well. In the beginning it was felt that a sponsor, who has actually been through the Fourth & Fifth Steps, was better suited to be of assistance in this manner than someone who had not actually taken these two Steps themselves. Although it was considered an unusual approach at the time, it has become much more common in AA in Southern Minnesota today.

**Meetings**

Although the Twelve Traditions suggest that our group purpose is to “carry its message”, the specific understanding of the function of an AA meeting was understood by the founders this way:
The sharing that takes place in a meeting is not intended to replace close work with one’s sponsor, or the development of a relationship with one’s God. The sharing was nothing more, or nothing less, than a description of how the Steps and Traditions had worked in the lives of those who worked them. It served the same purpose as that of the stories in the back of the Big Book – to assist others to understand how, through the practice of A.A.’s principles, one could develop a relationship with a power greater than themselves that would relieve them of their alcoholism.

The meeting was not the point of recovery – that took place between the drunk and their God. The meeting is simply an entryway to finding another alcoholic who can introduce the drunk to the principles of A.A, and an opportunity to see and hear how others applied the A.A. principles to their own lives.

It’s also a place where members who have already applied AA’s principles to their lives can be available to newcomers looking for sponsors. And, of course, where those same AA’s can find someone to carry their message to - so they can continue their own spiritual growth.

Responsibility Pledge / Lords Prayer

In the original meetings we closed with the Lords Prayer, as did the other AA groups we had seen. However, we had a person come to us, and get sober, of the Jewish faith. While he was a member of our group he did not challenge our format. After he graduated from one of the colleges, and was getting ready to move out of town, he brought to our attention that this method of closing could stand in the way of somebody getting or staying sober.

As you can imagine, this caused a great debate in our Group Conscience meetings. We debated at length, but finally came to the conclusion that the Responsibility Pledge could replace the prayer. This, we felt, was more in keeping with what we thought our meetings were all about – becoming responsible to the still-suffering alcoholic. It was thought that the Serenity Prayer would calm us so that we could hear other people’s message, and the Responsibility Pledge would point us in the right direction as we left the meeting.
Passing the basket and service can

We determined to never be apologetic for asking members to contribute to the financial needs of the group. This, we felt, was an excellent way to learn about the sacrifices needed to stay sober. Initially, we adopted (among the founders) a practice that we felt would help carry AA’s self-support message.

When one of the founders could not be at a meeting, as the basket was going around, another founder would say that he was “putting in a couple of dollars for John” because he couldn’t be here but had called and asked that member to contribute to the basket for him to make sure his part of the group expenses were covered.

Today, the Third Tradition Group rarely has any money problems. We have raised our own rent to our landlord from $50 per month to $300 per month by our own decision. Our landlord has never asked for an increase. In this way the group ensures that they can meet future expenses should they need to find another location.

We pass a “service can” because we want people to understand that what goes in the basket helps pay group expenses – but those aren’t the only expenses AA has. By passing this can, along with the basket, each of us can determine for ourselves how much goes to each service entity. Of course, to do this, one must pay attention to the GSR (General Service Representative) when they report. So one practice helps support another.

In another story about our practice the principle in the Seventh Tradition; we were badly in need of adding our own electrical service to the meeting rooms in order to avoid blowing circuit breakers, with our coffee pots, that would have a negative affect on the Drug Store above us. We asked a local electrician to give us an estimate for this. It came to over $1500.00. Being a small group we were a bit concerned about how we would pay for this. It was discussed at the Group Conscience Meeting and the decision was to go forward with the work. We would simply explain to our members what was being done and the need for it. We would also make a point that contributions to the project were not to reduce anyone’s contribution to the regular basket when it was passed – this was an ‘extra’ project and should be funded that way.

Upon informing the contractor that he could start the work, he commented; “Well, since you folks are doing such great work I won’t
charge you any labor – just the cost of the materials.” He was told that we appreciated his offer, but the group could not accept this. His reply was, “That’s kind of arrogant!” It was explained to him that we needed to be self-supporting. That many of us had taken advantage of friends and family to finance our adventures when we were drinking, and that it was important for us to learn to be responsible for our own plans and adventures today.

This contractor has become a great admirer and supporter of Alcoholics Anonymous. He has often spoken very kindly of our Fellowship in our community and is always interested in how we are doing.

**Our meeting introduction**

Initially, it was felt that many people came into A.A. meetings and never had the opportunity to have someone explain what the meeting was about. Therefore, they simply operated as they thought a meeting should operate. The end result of this was that meetings tended to drop to the lowest common denominator of what a meeting should be, rather than encouraging the A.A. member to reach for a higher and more spiritual way of life – and in that way striving to move to the highest common denominator. To put it simply; people tend to follow what they see, not what they hear. A favorite expression of one of the founders was, “Either you grow – or you go.” We hoped to provide the means, and the encouragement, for everyone to grow.

**Group Conscience Meetings**

We hold group conscience meetings, rather than group business meetings for a very distinct reason. Many of us have found that in a business meeting, the tone and focus was on making decisions and making them quickly. That it was simply a meeting in which ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ were decided. This is not what we wanted to achieve with the meeting in which the conduct of our group was decided. Our intention was to actually form a conscience of the group. By that we meant that the discussions taking place were to create a sense of what the group considered the right principles by which to operate. We believed that having formed this consensus, our group servants could easily use this sense of the group to make decisions - for the group and at other service functions. It was
important that the group provided guidance, rather than direction. However, in some difficult matters, the group has provided direction. Not because it felt that our trusted servants couldn’t make the best decision – but because we didn’t want to place the whole burden on their shoulders.

To accomplish this, two core elements were identified. 1) That, as a group, we would resist the desire and attempts to restrict the Group Conscience Meeting to a specific length of time. 2) That group members’ opinion would carry equal weight – regardless of their length of sobriety. It is a pleasure to report that in the Group Conscience of today, the founders hold little extra influence. While their comments may be considered a bit more than those of others, they are not deferred to, nor are they seen as someone who automatically has the clearest sense of an issue, or the best solution to it. This ensures that the group is not subject to the foibles of any ‘personalities’ and remains strong in spite of any of its members – rather than because of them.

To accomplish the first item, we realized that we ought to concentrate on the second. Therefore, not only were newer members allowed to speak and offer suggestions, they were actively invited and encouraged to do so.

This had two unforeseen effects on the meetings. The older members, in order to ensure that the newer members really understood any issue were careful to clearly spell out any proposals or opinions they had about the matters at hand. Because newer members could freely propose additions or changes in the group, many of the groups’ practices were under review on a somewhat frequent basis – allowing for the discussion of why a practice was started, and whether it was still necessary. It was this later element that also kept older members in attendance at the meetings to ensure that the reason for a practice starting could be explained.

Alternate G.S.R. chairing Group Conscience Meetings

This practice began in order to assist the G.S.R. It was felt that if the G.S.R. was chairing the meeting, they would be focused on conducting the meeting, missing the opportunity to see how the conscience of the group was coming together and what ideas it was composed of.

Therefore, we wanted the G.S.R. to really see the group conscience at work. To do this, we determined that the Alternate G.S.R. would chair
the meetings. This would also give the Alternate G.S.R. an opportunity to learn important service skills.

This practice was first introduced in the meeting in the early 1980’s. For a time, it was either forgotten or fell out of use as the group struggled with finding GSR’s who could find the time to fulfill all the tasks of the job. Although the group has maintained a general service presence since it’s beginning, there were some years when those serving struggled with the responsibility. This ebb and flow began to level out in the mid to late 1990’s.

**One group – many meetings**

This is probably the practice most often asked about by those who visit our group, especially from any large metropolitan area. It has always been a perspective of ours that an A.A. group is a living, breathing thing. Therefore, it actually exists outside the meeting. To our mind, an A.A. group is an entity that provides a variety of ways for the still suffering alcoholic to find their way to sobriety through Alcoholics Anonymous.

To us an A.A. group is a collection of sober alcoholics who have decided to come together in a united and common effort to carry the A.A. message. To do this, the group provides meetings, it carry’s its message to institutions, makes an effort to inform the public about AA, involves itself in those activities that work toward the development of a Group Conscience with the society of Alcoholics Anonymous, provides meetings and services that are specifically designed to inform potential newcomers to AA of AA’s program of recovery, and presents the standards of diligent practice of AA’s principles and sponsorship to all our members. Therefore, providing a Big Book meeting, a Step & Tradition meeting, and a Speaker meeting are only a part of the groups work. In our case, a meeting is not the group – merely one activity of it.

**Greeters**

Initially, everyone was a greeter. An often-recalled story about this has to do with a newcomer coming to the meeting and being profusely greeted with handshakes. However, at the very next Group Conscience Meeting almost everyone present was patting himself on the back for doing such
a good job of greeting newcomers. At one point someone asked the newcomer if he had anything to say. He replied, “Well, you guys certainly all shook my hand – but then nobody talked to me after that.” This certainly put everyone “in his place” and we resolved that this was a responsibility that could not be left to the old “it’s everybody’s responsibility” approach. Therefore, two greeters has become the norm for the group, thereby ensuring that those coming through the doors will have their full attention.

**Types of Meetings**

Initially, the group had only one meeting – a Step and Tradition meeting. It was felt that the Twelve Steps were the core of the AA program and that the Twelve Traditions were critical in helping us understand how to operate as a group. Also clearly spelled out in those first meetings, and in our Opening Readings today, was that we were only interested in experience. The persons who founded the group had all experienced more than enough of AA meetings in which there were great dialogs about the Steps, or long-winded elocutions about their spiritual underpinnings, but very little sharing of actual experience in working the Step. If there was one point on which each of the founders agreed to the fullest – this was it!

Later, many of the members (who had been reading and studying the Big Book) felt the need to also have this same sharing of experience with the directions in the Big Book. After doing some research, it was decided to start another meeting focused on studying the Big Book. However, unlike many of the Big Book meetings at the time, we decided that one person would not, and could not, be the sole leader of the meeting. It was to be chaired by a rotating chair, just as the Step meeting was.

The Big Book meeting struggled for some time. The weekly rotating chair idea didn’t seem to be working. Many folks said they felt intimidated by chairing a study of the Big Book. Then one of the members suggested having someone chair it for an extended period of time – but not permanently. The first attempt at this was to chair for 6 months. Apparently, this was virtually permanent in the minds of alcoholics like us. We then cut that in half and began to have someone chair it for 3 months. This is still the practice today. Also, although this is the first time it has been actually recorded, it has been the practice that nobody could chair it for two consecutive periods. That informal policy was to
ensure against a single members view of what the Big Book contains becoming a ‘standard’, as well as to make sure that everyone is encouraged to participate in chairing meetings.

The second type of meeting that was added to our schedule was the Open Speaker Meeting. The original intent was to present to the group members a particular standard of AA membership and practice of the AA program. Our first three speakers had all served as delegates to AA’s General Service Conference. This meeting was held once a month in the beginning. The entire group at the monthly Group Conscience Meeting determined who the speakers were to be.

After a time, we began to hold the Speaker Meetings weekly. At first this was a struggle. Some members were still attending other groups and this added more meetings to their week than they wanted to attend. Unknowingly, when we began this practice we didn’t realize that this was to be what really helped us develop the idea of a Home Group. Looking back on it, once the members began to realize that they could attend the types of meetings they wanted, all at the same group, they also began to develop a sense of being part of a Home Group because the group could provide all the things they needed for their involvement in AA.

The Speaker Meeting Committee was formed for two reasons. 1) Because the group had become too large to discuss three months worth of speakers at the Group Conscience Meeting (Too many of the newer members didn’t know anyone else in AA). 2) As a means to maintain “quality control” of those who came to speak to our members.

The second reason may sound a bit arrogant, but the group was very concerned about what was presented to new members. This was during a time when there were many approaches and theories that were being proclaimed by newer AA’s and some older members as well. The group felt it had a responsibility to ensure that those who attended the Speaker Meeting heard about the same AA program and Fellowship that was presented during the closed meetings. Therefore, it also became an unspoken policy that someone would not be asked to speak unless a member of the Speaker Committee had previously heard them speak, or they were a well thought of member of the Southern Minnesota Area Committee. While there have been some deviations from this over time, generally this has been seen as the best policy and has been adhered to.
There is one exception to this policy – those who reached one year of sobriety in the Third Tradition Group. In order to carry our message better, it was determined that the group needed to be the training ground. To do this, we would strongly encourage those who had recently celebrated their first sober year to tell their story at one of the Friday Open Speaker Meetings. The experience of the older members had been that this not only helped one become better at Twelfth Step work, it provided for that last and critical spiritual connection between the person and the group.

General Service Involvement

As you can see from the description of our first three speakers, involvement in AA’s service structure has been considered an essential element in this group. So much so that it became a problem in itself at one time. The group had become so involved with the service structure that there was almost nobody left on the home front to do the primary Twelfth Step work. Fortunately, there were those few souls who stayed at home and were finally able to bring the groups attention to bear on the problem of us failing to meet our Twelfth Step responsibilities. We will be forever grateful to them!

Over these past 20 years the group has provided Alcoholics Anonymous in Southern Minnesota with 3 delegates to the General Service Conference, 2 Alternate Delegates, 2 Area Chairpersons, 2 Area Secretaries, 2 Area Treasurers, 6 DCM’s, 4 Newsletter Editors, 3 Group Records Secretaries, 3 Literature Chairs, and 1 Public Information Chair. This group has been very blessed, not only with members willing to serve outside the group, but by the faith AA members in Southern Minnesota have shown in them.

Fortunately, we have remembered our lesson in making group activities, such as Twelfth Step work, our primary focus. Today, after some fluctuation in our commitment to general service work, we tend to focus on AA’s legacy of service, understanding that the legacy does not say General Service. We have, more often than not, had the privilege of choosing who our group servants are, rather than simply accepting the single soul who is reluctantly willing. Just as it is with our attitude about money, we don’t apologize for the opportunities to be of service to the group or AA as a whole. Being ‘of maximum service to God and our fellows’ is seen as an essential part of sobriety by most of our members.
This service extends not only to the group and AA; many of our members are providing much needed services outside of AA.

**Audio Taping Speakers**

This practice began almost as soon as we began having a Speaker Meeting. Simply, this was to ensure that our own members could hear our speakers’ stories as often as they wished to. It also provided for those who came later an opportunity to hear the first recounting of older members’ stories. Today we maintain an enormous tape library (a project to make this library much more accessible and useful is currently underway). This contains the stories of everyone who has spoken over the past 20 years at the Third Tradition Group. In addition, many members have contributed albums from many roundups around the country, as well as from a wide range of service activities.

**Chip System / Anniversary Cakes**

The Chip System was used from the very beginning. It was adopted from the practice of the Austin, MN AA group. We used it to accomplish several things. First, we wanted to help the newer members understand that there were others close to them in sobriety and to help communicate, to those receiving the chips (newcomers – white, 3 month - red, 6 month – blue, 1 year - gold), that the group was very interested in their sobriety. Second, we wanted them to get used to appearing before the group – that this was something that could be a positive experience.

At times, there have been proposals made to include a 9-month chip. This has always been responded to with the statement that the chips are not intended to be used to inflate the ego, but to expand the understanding of those receiving them. That once a person has reached 6 months of sobriety, they ought to be working with a sponsor and not need this effort from the group. The one-year chip (the only metal one we give) is intended to recognize a milestone in a person’s sobriety. As we say, “...we have now made it through all the days we used to celebrate. . . .”

At the last speaker meeting of the month we recognize years of sobriety. In keeping with no longer receiving the colored chips, we use cakes. Initially, the idea was to underscore the principle of sharing. The
chairperson of that particular meeting used to provide or arrange for the cakes. This was during a time when more family members were attending AA open meetings. Often a family member requested the opportunity to provide a cake. That has changed in recent years.

Some years ago now, we hit upon the idea that the person celebrating the anniversary would provide a cake for his or her own anniversary. The principle being, to reinforce the idea that “you have to give it away to keep it.” That practice continues today.

**Newcomers Meetings**

Much in the same way as with the greeters, we came to a point at which we realized that we needed to take a more coordinated approach to this extremely vital activity. The point was made that if a newcomer doesn’t truly know what their illness is (various agencies and institutions propose a variety of theories), how can they really come to see the Twelve Steps as attractive? Therefore, we determined that we would spend the effort and time needed to help potential members understand AA’s definition of alcoholism and what is required to recover from it. This has evolved into a multi-session meeting that meets in the hour immediately preceding the Open Speaker Meeting. The reason for this placement of the meeting is the hope that those attending will stay for the Open Speaker Meeting and hear a personal recounting of how it works in a person’s life.

While it is hoped that our newcomers will attend this meeting, we also offer a more traditional (two members sharing their experience with AA) approach in the event someone comes to one of our meetings for the first time.

**Smoking / Non-smoking**

This is an issue that has given many other groups a difficult time. We have certainly had our ‘spirited’ discussions over it as well. However, we have always (as of the date of this writing) come to a singular conclusion; that asking someone to give up both alcohol and tobacco at the same time is not a realistic approach to the newcomer. Therefore, our meeting place remains one at which a person can smoke.
We have not overlooked those who do not wish to smoke, or have given it up. Over the years we have purchased several smoke-handling machines. As the machines improved, the volume of smoke has decreased due to many of our members quitting smoking in the sobriety. While the atmosphere could not be described as “smoke free”, it has become reasonably pleasant for most people.

In addition, we have adopted a policy for the Speakers Meeting that asks members not to smoke during the speakers’ time at the podium, as well as a policy of non-smoking during the Group Conscience Meeting. As you may imagine, when dealing with a bunch of drunks, we sometimes ‘forget’ these policies and have to ‘re-adopt’ them.

We are people who normally would not mix
Dr. Bob’s Farewell Talk

My dear good friends in A.A. and of A.A.,

. . . I get a big thrill out of looking over a vast sea of faces like this with a feeling that possibly some small thing I did a number of years ago played an infinitely small part in making this meeting possible. I also get quite a thrill when I think that we all had the same problem. We all did the same things. We all got the same results in proportion to our zeal and enthusiasm and stick-to-itiveness. If you will pardon the injection of a personal note at this time, let me say that I have been in bed five of the last seven months and my strength hasn’t returned as I would like, so my remarks of necessity will be very brief.

There are two or three things that flashed into my mind on which it would be fitting to lay a little emphasis. One is the simplicity of our program. Let’s not louse it up with Freudian complexes and things that are interesting to the scientific mind, but have very little to do without our actual A.A. work. Our Twelve Steps, when simmered down to the last, resolve themselves into the words “love” and “service.” We understand what love is, and we understand what service is. So let’s bear those two things in mind.

Let us also remember to guard the erring member the tongue, and if we must use it, let’s use it with kindness and consideration and tolerance.

And one more thing: None of us would be here today if somebody hadn’t taken the time to explain things to us, to give us a little pat on the back, to take us to a meeting or two, to do those numerous little kind and thoughtful acts in our behalf. So let us never get such a degree of smug complacency that we are not willing to extend, or attempt to extend, to our less fortunate brothers that help which has been so beneficial to us.

Thank you very much