

July 1984

Buried Treasure

*Would you believe
fifty cents for a
Big Book
first edition?*

YEARS AGO, I had bought a Big Book at a garage sale to read up on an organization my grandfather became a part of and loved. I was not ready then to stop drinking. I later gave it away, barely reading it, in a box of books to my aunt. In 1976, I joined AA. A year later, after I disclosed my AA membership to this same aunt, she began attending AA and offered that same "old" Big Book to me, knowing it would mean more now than I was in the program.

The inscription read: "M——T.," with a last name and phone number. It was a 1939 copyright, sixth printing. I told my sponsor I would love to try and find the man, and she suggested I start with the Dallas phone book since the phone number was an an-

cient Dallas exchange. The huge directory offered me a dozen M——T.'s. How was I going to get the right one? The odds against his even being in Dallas were great.

I asked God to be my "bookie," and we went to work dialing the numbers listed. On the fifth call, I found the right person, who readily identified himself as a friend of Bill W. I told him what I had found, and the silence over the phone was deafening. I can only imagine how he must have felt. I had his first Big Book.

We agreed to meet at his group, which I had visited often, and I returned the book. This big man sank slowly into a chair, so touched by the moment, tenderly caressing the beloved old pages. We shared watery eyes in parting. I never saw him again. He passed away five months later, a winner, with seventeen years of sobriety.

While one story might be enough, would two be better?

Several years later, elbow-deep in the biggest, cruddiest old pile of books, I spied another Big Book at (you guessed it) another garage sale. I couldn't believe my eyes; goose pimples broke out all over me. Fifty cents was all the seller felt it was worth. I was so tempted to ask if she knew where this particular book came

from, but better judgment kept me from it.

I couldn't wait to get home and examine the names and personal notations scrawled all over it. The Big Town Group, Mesquite, Texas, was inscribed, along with past holders. I called a member of that group, to help me locate and return it to one of the members. He knew them all.

While on the phone, I realized the front flyleaf was stuck to the cover. Releasing it, I found the names of two original members, both longtime

personal friends, one of whom is my grandfather's sponsor. I felt touched by his spirit. I knew God was using me as his instrument. I took his "old" fifty-cent book to his house. Words can hardly express the emotional gratitude we shared, knowing well it was one of God's miracles we'd been blessed with. Is it not meaningful, too, that his sponsee's granddaughter would be the one to return his Big Book? Why me, Lord? But thank you just the same.

S.J., Terrell, Tex.

Notorious Gambler... (from page 23)

The woman in the picture is Sister Mary Ignatia of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine. The picture was taken in the alcoholic ward of St. Thomas Hospital, the first religious hospital to receive prospective members of AA for treatment on a regular basis.

Detox wards are relatively commonplace today, but in the mid-thirties, the idea of hospitalizing an alcoholic was considered foolish indulgence. These, after all, were the experience-poor, faith-powerful early days, when alcoholism was still considered a moral issue rather than an illness.

Sister Ignatia's gamble was helping co-founder Dr. Bob set up a detox ward at St. Thomas Hospital. The archives in the General Service Office hold a tape of a talk she gave at the International Convention at Long Beach, Calif., in 1960. If you're ever in New York, you can visit the archives and listen to her relate an incident from the beginning days of their detoxing efforts. Her voice is gentle, with a slight quaver, as if she was nervous addressing such a large group of AAs. It is difficult to imagine that anyone who sounds like that could be involved in something adventurous or nonconformist. Yet she smuggled their first drunk into the hospital through the flower room — literally under the nose of a disapproving night supervisor.

With characteristic understatement, she says: "I recall very distinctly coming to the chapel for prayer shortly after five one morning, only to be met by the night supervisor, who told me — in no unmistakable terms — that the next time I admitted a DT to the hospital, I had better stay up all night myself to run around the corridors after him."

Thank you, Sister Ignatia, for all of us.

C.S., Manhattan, N.Y.