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DR. BOB'S STORY

In the beginning there were Bill and Bob

DR. Bob was born August 8, 1879, in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, a typical New England village of some 7000 souls. As the only son of parents prominent in civic and church activities, his early childhood was spent under strict parental guidance.

Signs of inner revolt came at an early age. In later years the doctor liked to tell his children, Sue and Robert, of how he was put to bed every evening at five o'clock. He would go quietly enough, a fact which might have led the modern child-psychology-wise parent to suspect the worst, but which seemingly went unnoticed by the young man's parents. As soon as he was reasonably sure that he was considered safely asleep he would arise, dress and slip quietly downstairs and out the back door to join his village gang.

In the summers the family often spent some weeks in a cottage by the sea. Here Bob became an expert

swimmer. He and his foster sister, Nancy, spent many hours building and sailing their own sailboats. It was here that he saved a young girl from drowning.

While the boy, Rob, was high-spirited, considered rebellious and wayward, he was also industrious and labored long and hard at anything he really wanted to do. He wanted, above all else, to become a medical doctor like his maternal grandfather.

When he was about nine years old he began to show signs of liking to work, especially out of doors. That summer he was at a neighbor's farm helping the men load hay. Perhaps he was resting, perhaps he was prowling around poking under bushes to see what he could see ... he saw a jug ... he pulled the cork and sniffed. It was a new odor to this son of strict New England parents. If the stuff in the jug smelled so good, it

should taste good too. He liked the taste. He liked the way it made him feel. A little boy; a jug of hooch; the first securely welded link in the chain.

By the time he reached his teens, Rob was spending parts of his summers working on a Vermont farm or juggling trays and lugging baggage as a bellhop in an Adirondack summer hotel. His winters were passed trying to avoid the necessity of having to attend high school in order to receive a diploma. During his high school days young Rob learned much of what there is to know about a billiard table. He was a good student in spite of himself and graduated from St. Johnsbury Academy in 1898.

It was at a party given at the Academy that Dr. Bob first met Anne. A student at Wellesley, she was spending a holiday with a college chum. It was a small, reserved girl whom the tall, rangy Rob met that night. With an agile mind to match his own, Anne had a cheerfulness, sweetness and calm that was to remain with her through the years.

After high school at St. Johnsbury Academy came four years of college at Dartmouth. At long last the rebellious young colt was free of his parents' restraining supervision. New experiences were to be explored and enjoyed without having to give an accounting.

His first discovery in his search for the facts of life on the campus was that joining the boys for a brew

seemed to make up the greater part of after-class recreation. From Dr. Bob's point of view it was the major extra-curricular activity. It had long been evident that whatever Rob did, he did well. He became a leader in the sport. He drank for the sheer fun of it and suffered little or no ill-effects. His years at Dartmouth were spent doing exactly what he wanted to do with little thought of the wishes or feelings of others—a state of mind which became more and more predominant as the years passed. Rob graduated in 1902 ... "summa cum laude" in the eyes of the drinking fraternity. The dean had a somewhat lower estimate.

Now he held a Dartmouth diploma, but the desire to become a medical doctor was still with him. His mother, who had never approved of this career for her son, hadn't altered her views. For the next two years he worked for a large scale company; then he went to Montreal where he labored at selling railway supplies, and heavy hardware. He left Montreal and went to Filene's store in Boston.

All through this period he was drinking as much as purse allowed, still without getting into any serious trouble. But he wasn't making any headway either. He still wanted to be a doctor. It was time he was about it. He quit his job at the store and that Fall entered the University of Michigan as a pre-medical student.

Again he was free of all restraint. Earnestly, he got down to the serious

business of drinking as much as he could and still make it to class in the morning. His famous capacity for beer followed him to the Michigan campus. He was elected to membership in the drinking fraternity. Once again he displayed the wonders of his "patent throat" before his gaping brothers.

He, who had boasted to his friends, "Never had a hangover in my life," began to have the morning-after shakes. Many a morning Dr. Bob went to classes and, even though fully prepared, turned away at the door and went back to the fraternity house. So bad were his jitters that he feared he would cause a scene if he should be called on.

He went from bad to worse. No longer drinking for the fun of it, his life at Michigan became one long binge after another. In the Spring of his sophomore year, Dr. Bob made up his mind that he could not complete his course. He packed his grip and headed South. After a month spent on a large farm owned by a friend, the fog began to clear from his brain. As he began to think more clearly he realized that it was very foolish to quit school. He decided to return and continue his work.

The faculty had other ideas. After a long argument they allowed him to return to take his exams. He passed them creditably. After many more painful discussions, the faculty also gave him his credits. That Fall he entered Brush University as a junior. Here his drinking became so much

"He stayed around about two months more..."

worse than his fraternity brothers felt forced to send for his father. The Judge made the long journey in a vain effort to get him straightened out.

After those long disastrous binges, when Dr. Bob was forced to face his father he had a deep feeling of guilt. His father always met the situation quietly, "Well, what did this one cost you?" he would ask. Oddly enough this feeling of guilt would come, not because he felt that he had hurt him in any way, but because his father seemed, somehow, to understand. It was this quiet, hopeless understanding that pained him.

He was drinking more and more hard liquor now, and coming up to his final exams he went on a particularly rough binge. When he went in to the examinations his hand trembled so badly he could not hold a pencil. He was, of course, called before the faculty. Their decision was that if he wished to graduate he must come back for two more quarters, remaining absolutely dry. This he was able to do. The faculty considered his work so creditable, he was able to secure a much coveted internship in City Hospital in Akron, Ohio.

The first two years in Akron, as a young intern, were free of trouble. Hard work took the place of hard

drinking simply because there wasn't time for both. At one time during his internship he ran the hospital pharmacy by himself. This, added to other duties, took him all over the hospital, running up and down the stairs because the elevators were too slow, running here, rushing there as if the devil were after him. All this frenzied activity never failed to bring about an explosive, "Now where is that cadaverous young Yankee!" from one of the older doctors who became particularly fond of him.

Though the two years as intern at City were hectic, Dr. Bob had time to learn much from the older men who were glad to share their knowledge with him. He began to perfect his own skills so that he might become a specialist, a surgeon. When his two years of internship were over he opened an office in The Second National Bank Building, in Akron. This was in 1912. His offices were in the same building until he retired from practice in 1948.

He was completely out on his own now, and again free to do as he chose—some money in his pocket and all the time in the world. It may have been that reaction set in from all the work, the irregular hours, the hectic life of an intern. Whatever caused it, Dr. Bob developed con-

siderable stomach trouble. The remedy for that was, of course, a couple of drinks. It didn't take him long to return to the old drinking habits.

Now he began to know the real horror, the suffering that goes with alcoholism. In hope of relief, he signed in at least a dozen times in one of the local sanitariums. After three years of this torture he ended up in a local hospital where they tried to help him. But he got his friends to smuggle him in a quart. He got rapidly worse. Finally his father had to send a doctor out from St. Johnsbury to attempt to get him home. Somehow the doctor managed to get him back to the house he was born in, where he stayed in bed for two months before he could venture out. He stayed around town for about two months more, then returned to Akron to resume his practice. Dr. Bob was thoroughly scared, either by what had happened, by what the doctor had told him, or both. He went into one of his long dry periods.

In 1915 he went back to Chicago to marry Anne. He brought her back to Akron as his bride. The first three years of their married life were free of the unhappiness that was to come later. He became established in his practice. Their son Robert was born and life began to make a sensible



existence. Staying sober to earn enough money to get drunk, getting drunk to go to sleep, using sedatives to quiet the jitters, staying sober, earning money, getting drunk, smuggling home a bottle, hiding the bottle from Anne who became an expert at detecting hiding places.

This nightmare went on for seventeen years. Somehow he had the good sense to stay away from the hospital and not to receive patients if he were drinking. He stayed sober every day until four o'clock, then came home. In this way he was able to keep his drinking problem from becoming hospital gossip.

Through these years Dr. Bob was an active member of the City Hospital Staff and often he had occasion to go to St. Thomas Hospital, where in 1934 he became a member of the Courtesy Staff and in 1943 a member of the Active Staff. It was during one of these visits to St. Thomas, in 1928, that in the course of his duties, he met Sister Mary Ignatia, whose work with alcoholics was to become a legend.

Anne and the children now lived in a shambles of broken promises, given in all sincerity. Unable to see her friends, Anne existed on the bare necessities. About all she had left was her faith that her prayers for her husband would somehow be answered.

It then happened that Dr. Bob and Anne were thrown in with a crowd of people who attracted Dr. Bob because of their poise, health

and happiness. These people spoke of their problems without embarrassment, a thing he could never do. They all seemed very much at ease. Above all, they seemed happy. They were members of the Oxford Group. Self-conscious, ill at ease most of the time, his health nearing the breaking point, Dr. Bob was thoroughly miserable. He sensed that these newfound friends had something that he did not have. He felt that he could profit from them.

When he learned that what they had was something of a spiritual nature, his enthusiasm was somewhat dampened. Unfortunately his childhood background of church twice during the week and three times on Sunday had caused him to resolve that he would never appear in a church so long as he lived. He kept that resolve for forty years except when his presence there was absolutely necessary. It helped some to find out that these people did not gather in a church but at each other's homes.

That they might have the answer to his drinking problem never entered his head, but he thought it could do him no harm to study their philosophy. For the next two and one half years he attended their meetings. And got drunk regularly!

Then one Saturday afternoon, Henrietta called Anne. Could they come over to meet a friend of hers

who might help Bob.

At five o'clock Sunday evening they were at Henrietta's door. Dr. Bob faced Bill W. who said, "You must be awfully thirsty—this won't take us long."

From the moment Bill spoke to him, Dr. Bob knew that here was a man who knew what he was talking about. As the hours passed, Bill, newly sober himself, stranded in town on a business trip and panicked by his moment-to-moment danger of drinking, told of his experiences with alcohol. He told him of the simple message that a friend had brought, "Show me your faith and by my works I will show you mine."

Slowly at first, then with sudden clarity, Dr. Bob began to understand. Bill had been able to control his drinking problem by the very means that Dr. Bob himself had been trying to use—but there was a difference. The spiritual approach was as useless as any other if you soaked it up like a sponge and kept it all to yourself. True, Bill had been preaching his message at any drunk who would listen; he had been unsuccessful until now, but the important thing was that by giving his knowledge away, he, himself, was sober!

There was one more short binge for Dr. Bob after that talk. On June 10, 1935, he took his last drink, remaining sober until his death on November 15, 1950.

Habits are like cork or lead—they tend to keep you up or hold you down.

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