

April 1989

## Fifty Years of Sponsorship

Our second-hand book store had a near-new copy of *Alcoholics Anonymous* priced at \$3.95. The bookseller was surprised to learn the AA price, brand new, is only \$3.60.

Surprising developments have been more the rule than the exception in the fifty years of Big Book history. For instance, if we think about 1,600,000 AA members in 76,000 groups meeting in 119 countries, our book may well be the most quoted book written in the twentieth century.

Nearly in a class by itself (excepting, of course, *The Bible*) the Big Book is the only best-seller ever written by a committee. The stories of the AA pioneers were the experiences of businessmen, salesmen, a machinist, a housewife, a lawyer, a doctor, an upholsterer, a teacher, a bookkeeper, a ballet master, a newspaperman, a stockbroker — no writers of books. For comparison, try to imagine a successful symphony composed by a committee of nonmusicians.

After three editions and dozens of printings, we might expect to see a lot

of updating and changing of words and phrases — but no, the changes have been very few and carefully considered. For example, the term "ex-alcoholic" was changed to "ex-problem drinker" (pages xxiv, 18, 20, and 151), which makes it square with "once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic" (page 33).

This success story might surprise no one if the book's solution for alcoholism were based on self-will or ritual or therapy — what is remarkable, from the standpoint of selling the book, is that it is based on an idea most drunks don't want to hear about. The basic text of *Alcoholics Anonymous* told me my relation to God is nonexistent or in need of repair, and suggested that (just as Bill did in chapter one) I should humbly offer myself to God "as I then understood Him."

An important anniversary, April 1989: the fiftieth birthday of the Big Book — fifty years of service and still sponsoring every one of us.

*Anonymous, Medford, Ore.*