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HOW 14 CALIFORNIA GROUPS GREW TO 22

Just over one year ago, Bill made a two-month visit to the West Coast, one month of which was spent in Los Angeles and immediate environs. It, therefore, is natural that the twenty-two A.A. groups in the Los Angeles area should, at this time, reflect on some of the benefits reaped from his visit.

Ostensibly Bill did little or nothing here but tell us informally what he thought about A.A., 'how it happened to him,' and how it worked elsewhere. He gave us no orders and left us no mandates. He proved a past master at dodging when a definite difficulty of a group was thrown into his lap for solution. His answers always ignored that problem but recounted how a group far away met a similar issue. That set the inquirer thinking and in most cases he solved the problem himself. The result was that Bill left us with a realization that he had tossed the ball right back to our pitcher, with a kindly hint that we play ball according to the A.A. rule book. And that seemed to work.

For it made us realize that, in our group problems, as in our alcoholic problems, our "stories are all the same." And so we all set to work to play the game better.

One result is that twenty-two A.A. groups exist now in the area which had fourteen when Bill was here. The membership then was about seven hundred. Now it nears two thousand.

We learned from Bill that A.A. is an answer to a universal need of mankind; that it cannot belong even to him, its founder; that it cannot be controlled by those who precede others in membership.

He taught us that only those have a right to A.A. who use it with the singleness of purpose for which it was founded and handed to us. He taught that those whose ideas veer from A.A. ideals get off the beam and, sooner or later, fail in sobriety when they begin using substitutes instead of "practicing A.A. principles in all our affairs."

Bill remarked while here that sometimes he is startled when he regards the growth of A.A. and realizes that, while he started it all, he does not control it, and has no desire to. He sees that what he gave the world is the world's to use. And if the man who needs it misuses it he does so to his own loss alone. No one can hurt A.A. fatally. No one can stop its growth.

Bill's visit here made us A.A.s realize that we were free to form our own A.A. groups in direct affiliation with the New York Foundation and that no senior individual or group had district or territorial jurisdiction so long as the new group conformed to the Foundation's requirements. We learned that, just as each member may interpret for himself (with honesty, of course), so each group may do the same, with the same requirement of honesty.

The result of this was courage for free development and lessening of friction by enabling any members, dissatisfied with the way their group was conducted, to join another group or launch a new group with persons they consider more congenial.

Bill convinced us of the universality of A.A. - that it is as unrestricted as is its need. He made us realize that we alcoholics out here are not California alcoholics, but just alcoholics, branded by a global, not a sectional, disease.

And this understanding has led to more intelligent methods of operating - to methods that are more tolerant of the opinions of others.

In other words, Bill gave us the principle that no one need have too great concern about Alcoholics Anonymous getting into "inexperienced hands."

We learned, as Bill expressed it, that any good idea will work and any bad idea, when tried, will fail of its own weakness. One thing alone is a *sine qua non* in A.A. - honesty with ourselves. With it A.A. and its members are safe.

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