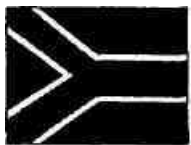


October 1996



How AA STARTED IN

# South Africa

*A brief history of 50 years of AA in South Africa (1946-1996)*

One of the earliest AA pioneers in South Africa was Arthur S. of Johannesburg. Arthur, a stockbroker, first found out about AA from an article in *Reader's Digest*, which featured Alcoholics Anonymous quite prominently. He wrote to the AA office in New York and received a pamphlet. Armed with nothing more than this, Arthur started the first group of Alcoholics Anonymous in South Africa.

Around the same time, a black man named Solomon was wandering the streets of Alexandra Township near Johannesburg. He was in desperate straits

when he found a tattered copy of a magazine which featured AA. He also contacted New York requesting help and he got sober. Meanwhile, some 1,000 miles away in Cape Town, Pat OF. also found a solution by writing to New York.

While the message was being received by Arthur, Solomon, and Pat, the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* was given to Val D., who having received this simple set of spiritual principles, single-handedly did more to encourage the spread of AA in this country than any other person at that time. These four men were all unaware of the ac-

tivities of the others and they persevered in solitude for quite some time.

Val D. started the printing and distribution of a local magazine on the East Rand (a gold mining area east of Johannesburg) in the early fifties with a minimum of assistance. The magazine was called the *Tendril*. For many years Val never missed an issue, despite the difficulties he worked under. The task was later taken over by the Service and Information Committee under the name *AA Newsletter*. It was printed on a manually-operated duplicator at the General Service Office, then in Pretoria. The printer was Eddie who was completely dedicated to this task and considered it to be his own. He was a committed AA member, but despite his regular attendance at meetings he had great difficulty in maintaining his sobriety. There were times when, in order to keep him going at the machine, it was necessary to pop down to the local liquor store for a "long wine" which would allow him to finish the job. He eventually found sobriety after eleven years of trying and later married Eda who was a fellow member and GSO's long-serving voluntary typist.

In 1965, it was decided to give the publication a uniquely South African flavor and after much discussion and deliberation, the name was changed to *Regmaker*, which is Afrikaans for "right maker" or "hair of the dog that bit me" — the drink that a hangover sufferer will have to feel human again. Many happy hours of fellowship were had

when members from a number of AA groups came together to collate and staple *Regmaker*. Despite a very determined effort, the circulation of the national magazine remains disappointing. We compensate by extensive use of the publication for PI and CPC work, and in correctional and treatment facilities. Fifty percent of the copies are given away at no charge as part of our PI and CPC efforts.

Arnold, a Cape Town member, started a Loners newsletter in the mid-nineteen-fifties. It was his personal project and he met all expenses himself. It consisted mainly of articles written by Arnold himself and extracts from other publications, some of which were very philosophical in content. The publication later became the responsibility of our GSO and the name became *Ako-Solo*. Many members from beyond our borders, including the United States, receive *Ako-Solo*.

The first black groups were started by Dinkie D. at the compounds of the West Driefontein Gold Mine in the early fifties. Meetings were held regularly on Sundays and because of the large number of different languages spoken in the mines it was necessary to use up to four translators. Certain basic AA literature was translated into at least three indigenous languages: Khosa, Sesotho, and Zulu. Unfortunately, all efforts to propagate the use of indigenous-language literature has to a large degree failed, except for Zulu, for which there has always been a large

demand. Perhaps it's because the translations were too literal and didn't use vernacular or idiomatic language which might have better expressed certain ideas.

Andries K. took charge of coordinating the translation of the Big Book into Afrikaans, the well known *Alkoholiste Anoniem*. It was a unique undertaking, to our understanding the first attempt at translating the Big Book into another language. Each chapter was given to an individual Afrikaans-speaking member to translate.

Although the translation was fairly well accepted by Afrikaans members, many of them still preferred the English version. Some libraries and institutions refused to place the Big Book on their shelves describing the language as "lomp." Because it was translated by so many people, each with his own style of writing, it didn't flow.

However, this translation did serve a great purpose for AA and was well received by Dutch Reform Dominees, among whom copies were distributed (thanks to the contributions by AAs for this purpose). A new translation was completed in the early eighties. It's an outstanding effort and many English-speaking members have commented on the excellent manner in which the expressive Afrikaans language sets out certain Steps.

An audio cassette tape service, run under the auspices of GSO, was begun in 1967. As a result we have a keen tape fraternity with a steady demand

for both local and overseas recordings. In addition, the Big Book in Afrikaans is available on tape.

AA's first tenuous steps toward a conference structure took place in Durban in 1951 when a Service and Information Committee was formed. This committee continued to meet in Pretoria until the General Service Office was formed in Johannesburg in 1964. When the office was moved from Pretoria to Johannesburg that year, a large truck was borrowed for the purpose of transporting the assets of the Fellowship. The move took three torturous trips and since the vehicle was open, it was necessary for three or four members to sit on the contents to prevent everything from being blown away.

The first Board of Trustees was formed in 1969, and in that year South African World Service delegates were invited to attend the first AA World Service Meeting in New York. We've been privileged to attend each of the World Service Meetings since then.

Mainly as a result of the dedicated effort of some individual members, we've gained access to a number of prisons throughout the country. On leaving these institutions, ex-inmates are directed to groups nearest their homes. Those on house arrest or bail can attend meetings, and are often requested to do so by the courts. Most groups will provide proof of attendance to satisfy judiciary requirements.

Growth of the Fellowship in South

Africa has not been without problems and it still is vital to implement the sound principles of structure as laid out in the Service Manual. We're currently busy redrafting the South African Service Manual so it will serve the specific needs of the South African context.

While keeping strictly to our Tradition of attraction and not promotion, our national public information committee has over the years arranged national coverage and airings of radio and television spots to carry the message. Over the years, we've also been able to establish cordial relations, despite some real problems, with neighboring countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia,

Namibia, Botswana, Swaziland, and Mozambique, often being able to help with the supply of literature and attendance at rallies, roundups, etc.

Today, South Africa has more than 320 groups throughout the country, and we're abundantly aware of our responsibility to continue to pass on the message. "The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking." In South Africa this loved and wonderful Tradition has been rigorously implemented without regard to social restrictions throughout fifty years. We're proud of having been a rainbow Fellowship long before South Africa became a rainbow nation.

*Johannesburg, South Africa*