

February 1952

LOS ANGELES

STRAIGHT OUT OF THE
 "BIG BOOK" AND OPEN
 MINDED AS A BARN DOOR
 ——— THAT'S L.A.'S AA

SINCE all AA is embodied in "The Book," and comes out of The Book, it stands to reason that AA anywhere is basically the same, modified by the character of the area in which it grew up, the nature of the people who helped to shape it, area-wise, and the circumstances that surrounded them.

Los Angeles is big and sprawling — so is Los Angeles AA. Los Angeles grew fast — too fast, some people say - so did AA in Los Angeles. Los Angeles is a melting pot; whatever you can find in the wide, wide world, you can find at least a little of here. It's the same with AA in Los Angeles — whatever has happened in AA anywhere, good or bad, has happened in AA here; whatever you will find in AA anywhere, we have (or have had) at least a little of it.

But one thing we are proud of — and shamelessly proud, since we know it is due to the values inherent in AA itself, rather than to any undue virtue in the typical Los Angeles drunk: in Los Angeles, which has brazenly exploited every fantastic cult and ism that ever assaulted public taste and morals, Alcoholics Anonymous has been, and is, conservative, middle-of-the-road, straight out of The Book. and, give or take a few errors on the part of an expectable percentage of screwballs, as close to our Twelve Traditions as human frailty permits.

True, we have our own forms of observing and following the general

line of AA practice, but so, we know, has every area populated by our brothers-in-the-bond. And, as do our brothers, we have an especial and jealous love for our own methods, even while we admire and respect the differences in method that are practiced elsewhere.

AA in Los Angeles is as open as a barn door. That is, perhaps, its most immediately obvious characteristic to the visitor. Anyone can attend almost any meeting — our very few "closed" meetings are closed — in most cases — in the sense of "men only" or "women only." Restrictive or exclusive rules just don't exist in Los Angeles. How can you have them in a melting pot? The visiting AA (or the non-alcoholic who suddenly gets an explorer's yen to see what AA is like) can have his choice of a dozen or more meetings on any night in the week — and a good many in the daytime, too. The Los Angeles AA member not only can have his choice, but takes it. He may attend his home group religiously, but he "gets around," and he's always welcome. Outside, we may be poles apart: in AA, we are as interchangeable as Ford parts. You'll see winos in Beverly Hills, and silk-sheet ex-drunks at the Midnight Mission.

If you ever are a visitor to Los Angeles, be chary of trying to characterize "Los Angeles AA" unless you've attended at least *a dozen different* groups, in all parts



PSYCHO COURT: Historically significant, it's "Alcoholic School" saw first AA Book in Los Angeles. Point of first AA contact for many present-generation AAs.

of town and country. We have as many *types* of groups, almost, as we have types of drunks. We do have a somewhat standardized meeting format, followed by many groups, but you'll find dozens of variations of it, and dozens of departures from it.

We have large groups and small groups and in-betweens; groups where everyone seems well-heeled, and groups where nobody has a sound seat in his pants; groups for younger people, beginners' groups of various types, and "Saturday Evening Post Groups" where a nine-year man can exercise his

humility and a six-year man can properly be called "junior." Speak Spanish? Try our Latin-American groups. Like the warmth, the good-humored patience and the deep-rooted integrity of Negroes? You'll find brotherhood in our colored groups. Want to get down to bed-rock AA? Visit the 12th Step House for men, the Midnight Mission, various jail groups, or the regular open meetings in one of our state hospitals.

Like to see AA working at the grass roots? Catch a beginners meeting where new people haltingly and gratefully tell their shining

new experience, or where some wine-wrinkled, humor-leavened old-timer tries to explain the unexplainable miracle by passing on his experience to a room-full of skittery (and frequently half-stiff) newcomers.

You can laugh at us, too, if you like. Many of our groups (and members) are uninhibitedly happy to pass out and receive birthday cakes — the givers and receivers alike sharing the joy and the miracle of X years of sobriety; some groups give AA pins . . . and, of course, some don't, and would be duly shocked if some new committee member suggested it. Yes, it takes all kinds, and, thank God, we've got 'em.

The "average" AA meeting in Los Angeles (meaning a majority of them) will go something like this: The leader welcomes you, tells what AA is, as best he can, and then — *he calls on Joe Doakes* (or Jane Doe, or any member) *to read the Steps*.

That last clause is italicized because, of everything you find in our AA, the reading of Chapter Five, from its start, through the first or second paragraph following The Steps, is our most cherished tradition. From the time of our first recorded open meeting to the present, almost every meeting in the Los Angeles area begins with The Steps. But to continue: The Steps having been read, the leader introduces his first speaker (usually

one of two) and the speaker tells his story, following the classic pattern as set down in The Book — "what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now." After the first speaker, newcomers are asked to make themselves known by raising their hands — "so that we may know and welcome you" — and like as not, the leader will then ask all *members* to raise their hands — "so that you new people will know you're among friends." Follows the second speaker; announcements by the secretary; next, "we have no dues or fees, but —" and the hat is passed; and finally, The Lord's Prayer, followed by coffee and doughnuts, and the heart-to-heart, personal AA that seems to clinch and solidify all the good things of the meeting.

But we have meetings with three speakers, and ten speakers, and no speakers at all; we have discussion groups where you can write questions and drop them into a hat to be drawn out for answering by all and sundry — good answers, too; and men's groups where the AA is as straight and direct as a punch in the nose, and women's groups where the female ex-drunks can be themselves without shocking the Kuppenheimers off the thin-skinned male. We have a group composed entirely of "slippers," and damn fine AA it is, too. You name it, we have it, chances are.

Then there's the Alsop Club, a fraternal fellowship of men who

meet once a month to enjoy dinner together, have a few laughs, and discuss their common problems. Not an AA group, in the generally accepted sense — just members of AA, who find that this type of meeting offers its own highly specialized type of pleasure and therapy.

We have "family groups," where the non-alcoholic wife or husband can grow and learn and develop in AA; where the benefits of shared experience and group strength can help the puzzled, hurt and frightened spouse of a newly-dry drunk to understand and accept this new way of life that promises so much — and delivers even more.

The contributions of the non-alcoholic here (as everywhere) have given AA much of its strength and growth. While the sober ex-drunk is carrying the message to a shaky novice, the non-alcoholic, carrying an equally hopeful message to the new non-alcoholic, is doing much to insure the newcomer's "latching on" — and staying on.

One of our luckiest breaks, Bill has told us, is that, in the beginning, we had no old-timers, no Senators or Deacons, no Old Master Barbers to "set us straight." Our grand-pappies in AA literally had to "take it from The Book," and you'll find no meeting where The Book isn't "sold" as well as "offered for sale." ("And if you can't afford one now, your sponsor will lend you one, or this group will see that you get one—" — an

oft-heard statement.)

Such phrases as "It says in The Big Book" or "Our Book tells us -" are strung through every talk you hear around Los Angeles, and the statement, "I'm a 'Book man' myself" is the proudest claim of many a solid AA.

We're good patrons of the Works Publishing Company; You'll find a good selection of free literature at most any group, along with our ever-growing directory and a certain beloved "little brown pamphlet," a simple explanation of AA written years ago by two men of the early groups. In passing, nobody except the printers ever made a dime from that pamphlet, and they didn't make much.

Yes, it takes all kinds. And again, thank God we've got 'em. We hope always to "keep it open for all kinds" — because we want any kind to be sure of finding his own kind in our ranks.

In the old days, pioneers took tinder, brought flint and steel together to create a spark; the spark caught in the tinder, and nursing produced a tiny flame. Fed with twigs, it slowly grew until it spread enough to enwrap larger twigs, and the larger fire spread among branches, and finally, with a great enveloping warmth, the pioneer had a livingbed of coals. When a neighbor moved in, the first pioneer took him a "chunk of fire" to start a fire of his own, and coals from the second fire went to the third



WONDERFUL NUMBER: 2200 West Seventh. Home of L.A.'s "Mother Group;" spiritual cradle of AA for many who came in after summer of 1941. Still houses "Mother Group" and other meetings.

neighbor, and so on.

In 1939, in Los Angeles, there was plenty of AA tinder (as yet unlighted) but the flint and steel had not yet drawn together.

In July, 1939, a young psychology major (a non-alcoholic) went to work in Psycho Court "Special Investigating Officer, Superior Court, Grade 1 (Psychopathic)" - and it was not long until his deep interest in his fellow humans was set boiling by the number of non-psychopathic patients (alcoholics all) who paraded daily before the court. His

boss, a woman deeply stirred by the stream of human misery which swirled in and through the court, listened to his idea of an "Alcoholic School," liked it, and in September, 1939, this test-tube of culture into which the germ of Alcoholics Anonymous would eventually fall, opened its first session. Alcoholics, "sentenced" to the school as a part of their probation, took to it like a wino to muscatel. Why not? It was better than a State Mental Hospital, and if you kept your tongue stuffed firmly in your

cheek, and a bottle in your overcoat pocket, what harm could it do? Of course, the young man of good will would batter his head against a stone wall, but if he insisted on trying to dry up drunks with psychotherapy and mental hygiene — and on his own time, mind you — what could he expect?

But the flint and steel were drawing closer together.

A non-alcoholic woman, on whom a bitter experience with an alcoholic husband had left no effect except an increased desire to help people seemingly beyond help, had come to Los Angeles. With her she brought an odd sort of book written by an ex-drunk (with the help of a hundred others) who had gotten sober by following some simple but rather unusual principles. With the book in her hand, she had told its story to newspaper women and priests, editors and policemen, but, aside from a story or two, published when news was slack, she had drawn nothing but blanks.

Around December 1, 1939, when the young man in the Alcoholic School of Psycho Court was about convinced that his charges needed something stronger than mental hygiene — a shot in the head with a .38, for example — the woman with The Book accompanied a friend to Psycho Court, and as usual, was primed to talk about the miracle that was happening to drunks back East. But this time, something happened. She talked to a woman

who knew all about the Alcoholic School upstairs, and the so-far unsuccessful efforts of the young man with the idea.

Would the lady with The Book care to meet the young man who was looking for stronger medicine for his alkies? Would the flint care to meet the steel?

There should be bigger type to tell of that meeting, but after all, flint and steel don't make much noise, or produce a great explosion. The spark falls into the tinder; if it isn't nursed carefully, it goes out. But this one didn't go out.

Two "students" in the Alcoholic School devoured The Book, and their excitement infected some other reluctant souses. The need for a *place to talk about it* was there for anyone to see; the non-alcoholic woman had a little house on Benecia Street, in West Los Angeles, and just as the flame naturally follows the spark, the need and the place and the desire added up to a meeting.

December 19th, 1939 - an important date in Los Angeles. A wire went to Bill that night: "*Held our first AA meeting in Los Angeles.*" And the fire was on its way. Small, of course, and feeble, but there was a great need, and there were people to nurse it along.

Two meetings at the house on Benecia Street, and the lady went to Honolulu — but not before one of the new AAs had promised his Glendale home for the meetings.

And the fire grew.

There was confusion at those first meetings. Nobody knew how a meeting should be conducted. But there was The Book, and its promises, and its instruction. And there was the warmth and security of being together and working together. And there must have been a touch of the same inspiration that guided Bill's hand when he wrote The Book.

The boss of the young man who had provided the tinder in his Alcoholic School remembers that first meeting vividly. And she remembers most vividly that a quotation came to her mind as she watched the faces come alive with hope: "There is no power on earth like an idea whose time has come."

February, 1940— meetings moved to a house on Gower Street— the non-alcoholic woman had come back to Los Angeles. And growth was beginning. A woman AA from back East believed that two meetings a week wouldn't be too many, and the Pasadena Home Group was born. The third "scholar" from Psycho's Alcoholic School had, during that February, hired a Masonic Hall on Pico for a meeting or two, and another had been held in an apartment in the Southwest. The fire was licking among the twigs.

And in late March, 1940, a train from Denver dropped a big branch on the fire — a dynamic drunk who had sobered up solo, with only The Book, in Palm Springs in December of '39, had tried unsuccessfully to

start a group in Denver, and who now came to make his own contribution to AA in Los Angeles.

Just as he needed the AAs he found in Los Angeles, so did they need him. Within a month or six weeks, two things of significance happened: the woman who had brought the Book to Los Angeles left again, and the Denverite who had inherited the leadership planned, with the help of the first Los Angeles AAs what is said to be the first public meeting in Los Angeles.

Many a Los Angeles AA member has passed the Cecil Hotel on Main Street between Sixth and Seventh (Skid Row's "Broadway"), without giving it a sentimental thought — but it was on the mezzanine balcony of this hotel that what came to be called "the Mother Group" had its inception — probably around May 15th, 1940. And our legends say that it was at this first meeting that the custom of reading the first two-and-a-half pages of Chapter Five came into being.

The benign fever that drunks have to cure other drunks is the self-perpetuating draft that keeps the AA fire spreading - that's true everywhere. The spread of the thing in Los Angeles was high-speed from the start. One meeting had become two meetings within a month; sporadic meetings popped up in homes here and there from sheer AA hunger and enthusiasm, and in

March, hardly three months after the first meeting, the first attempt at a combination club-and-rehabilitation center was made, in a rented house on Crescent Heights Drive. A non-alcoholic woman doctor (one of the few medicos of that day who had much sympathy for drunks) gave her assistance, and there was enthusiasm and hope (but not much else) to go on. So, like many other attempts to walk during the crawling period, this effort died on the vine.

Thus far, you can see that AA in Los Angeles followed the classic pattern. First, drunks needing help, plus The Book, equals a meeting. More drunks come, and there are two meetings. Meetings get too big for the home, and you hire a hall. And then you need some organization.

At the Cecil Hotel, the "Los Angeles AA Group" began to have its growing pains. Committees were formed, listed in still-existing reports made by the first non-alcoholic secretary under such headings as "Board of Directors," "Contact," "Entertainment" and "Publicity." Both alcoholics and non-alcoholics served.

Sometime in October, 1940 (a consensus date), the group had grown too large again, and in a burst of optimism, the great auditorium at the Embassy Hotel was hired. Without enough of a crowd to deaden the echo, a room of more modest dimensions was bespoke for the

next meeting, and this time the walls were swelled with too many people. Two months, three months of ups and downs at the Embassy, and a move was made to "the ideal spot," the Patio Room at Los Angeles' fabulous Elks Club. And again, things happened.

Many regard this brief period at the Elks Club as perhaps the most significant in our growth. Only, at that time, growth was slow. One old-timer who came in in December, 1940, remembers that "it wasn't easy to find Alcoholics Anonymous, and *we kept it that way*. A carefully selected group of priests, judges and policemen knew about AA; our phone number wasn't listed, and could be gotten only from Information; in that way, we knew that any newcomer who found us had, generally, made enough of an effort to guarantee the sincerity of his desire for sobriety."

But, during this period from December, 1940, to sometime in the late Spring of 1941, events, large and small, which forecast the direction in which we would grow, and which set precedents for traditions, came along. For example:

First AA Phone: at the home of a member, on San Vicente.

First Daytime Group: established to help a member suddenly placed on the swing shift, who otherwise would have had no contacts or meetings.

Coffee and Doughnuts: served at meetings by non-alcoholics, fur-

nishing the "social hour" which has come to mean so much to all of us.

Beginners' Meetings: Started as a "pre-meeting" cram session to post the newcomer on basic fundamentals of AA; usually held in the kitchen.

And finally, in March, 1941 . . .

The Jack Alexander article in the Saturday Evening Post.

Everyone in AA knows what happened everywhere when that deep-searching, understanding article

broke on the two-million-plus circulation of the Post. For a while, the fire almost got out of hand. Wherever any mention had ever been made publicly of Alcoholics Anonymous (and that included Los Angeles) a stampede of sick alcoholics and their eager, hopeful non-alcoholic partners swamped the few AAs who had "found it the hard way."

Within a few weeks, the Patio Room at the Elks had split at the seams, and another move, caused

CENTRAL SERVICES: Visiting fireman, drunk needing help, worried non-alcoholic, or seeker after information . . . all are welcomed, all are helped, who visit our Central Office.



by growth, had taken the L.A. Group to Townsend Hall, in the Regent Arms Apartments on Sixth Street. But the fire was beginning to roar, now, and soon (best remembered as "probably the middle of May, 1941") another move was made, and one which established a certain address in the minds of thousands of AA's who came into the movement in the years since.

2200 West Seventh. The house on Benecia Street may be a shrine; the Cecil Hotel may be a most historic landmark; the Elks Club beloved of "The Saturday Post Boys" — but to the thousands who reeled and stumbled and crept into AA after May, 1941, "2200" has a special and tender significance — the spiritual cradle of their own AA.

From this point on, the tale of growth becomes almost monotonous. A few highlights:

The Beginners Meeting became a full-fledged, separate meeting, moved to Monday (as an accommodation to the brothers for whom a Lost Week-End had provided the Great Incentive?)

The Big Meeting adopted a new format — first half of the meeting, wide open; second half, closed to alcoholics only, with non-alcoholics going upstairs to hold their own meeting.

AA seems to be like alcohol - give an alcoholic a little of it, and it sets up an intolerable craving for more. One meeting a week was not enough — and Los Angeles is

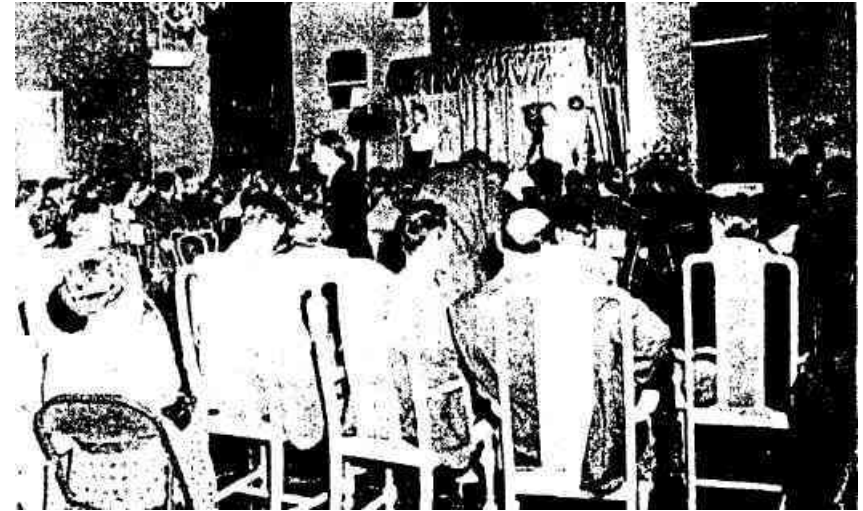
all sprawled out — what's the matter with having *another* meeting, close to home?

So, through 1941, in South Pasadena and Long Beach, in San Bernardino and North Hollywood, in Orange County and South Gate and the Glendale-Burbank area, new groups sprang up. (But not necessarily in that order . . . nobody remembers for sure.)

In November, 1941, the AA phone was given up, and replaced by a Post Office Box in Hollywood. Still gun-shy of publicity, and still convinced that if a neophyte had to seek earnestly for AA, he had proved he wanted it, the founders spread little news of meetings and meeting places. Letters to the Post Office Box were relayed to group secretaries, and calls and contacts were made on a thorough, business-like, "follow-up and follow-through" basis.

The war came, and gas rationing made de-centralization even more attractive — which meant more groups.

And let's face it, another basic alcoholic quality helped, Bob Benchley once said: "The Irish are a great race, fond of dancing and light whines." And we alcoholics are great people, fond of loving and bickering, loving the idea of tolerance, but having no great talent for it, and quick to disagree with "authority," even (maybe especially) when it's authority that we ourselves have



INTERGROUP ASSOCIATION: Election meeting of Nov. 18, 1951; delegates meet to accept re-organization plan, new "zone plan." A step toward adoption of "Secretary's Handbook" plan of gov't.

constituted.

A fellow came through here three years ago from Flint, Michigan, and made a profound observation: "When people disagree in AA, we don't lose an old member, we gain a new group." So, God moves us along in his own good way, making us use our very character defects for the general betterment. Hurt feelings, wounded ego — and bang! a new group. We can and do improve through defects.

Some of that fission which caused sparks to fly in all directions from the original fire came from profound beliefs that meetings should be more "open," not only in accepting the non-alcoholic, but in making

AA easier to find. Perhaps the first group in the area to offer the message of AA openly was the South Pasadena Group — they ran a weekly ad in their local newspapers, inviting inquiries to a box number, with their subsequent growth pointing the way to broader policies for all groups.

AA, from its start, grew and developed by trial and error. In viewing a work so perfect as The Book, an outsider might say: "You had been all through it by 1939." But he would have overlooked a vital sentence in the book: "We are not saints." Trial and error goes on, and God willing, it always will. Where else does progress come from?



SOCIAL LIFE: Portion of comfortable, rambling "6300 Club." Dances, cards, lunch bar, conversation . . . and three AA meetings weekly.

Perhaps every method of leadership hasn't been tried by Los Angeles groups, but if one we don't know about comes along, some group will try it, you can make book.

The leader-and-co-leader (for long or indefinite periods) was our first method. A few groups still maintain it, for three or six months. Most lean to a rotating committee of four to six members, each member serving for four to six months, and, on his appointed night, having charge, responsibility and leadership all in his lap. Others elect "steering committees" for a year, the committee appointing leaders of meetings from among the membership. Still others automatically

make *every member a committee member* — all you have to do is put your name on the list.

Beginners' meetings also follow various forms. The oldest of these is directed from off-stage by the committee of the "Mother Group," and boasts a rotating panel of eight solid old-timers known for their ability to explain the message in its simplest and most potent forms. The Arlington Group appoints a responsible leader (from the parent group) for a three-month period; he selects his own rotating panel of speakers. The North Hollywood Group has two well-known members who alternate as leaders, explaining AA in "short takes" between

short talks from volunteers in the group. And there are many more, each group having its own methods.

The wonderful thing, of course, is that all of the different meeting formats, all the different group government structures, are successful in accomplishing their prime purpose — "to help the sick alcoholic to recover, if he wishes."

Certainly, if a member doesn't like the way it's done in his group, he can find another where it's done to his liking.

Strange how a need in AA is answered before it's recognized. By 1942, the "Mother Group" had realized AA needed some protection, since its growth was attracting opportunists who saw in the dynamic new movement a means to their own ends. It was incorporated about July, 1942 — and state laws necessitated (for corporate purposes only) an anomaly in Alcoholics Anonymous — officers, no less. And so, for a brief period, we had a president, vice-president, and all the appurtenances. But the incorporation still left a need unanswered — the need for centralized services and direction.

In 1943, a few AA s wanted to make a motion picture, but, realizing they should clear it with some authority, found there was no authority to clear it with. Out of their need, the "first member" himself came to Los Angeles. No greater log than Bill ever fell on our fire. Out of that visit came our

first introduction to the real responsibility of the recovered alcoholic — to make this thing available to the drunk who needed it.

One of Bill's first suggestions was that a couple of representatives from each group get together to talk about forming a Central Committee. First of all, it was an open forum, with Bill attending.

From that first "Central Committee" came new and stronger foundation stones. Among them: a Central Office, with a full-time paid secretary, and an open phone number; a program of public relations that brought us into contact with city government, with industry, with hospitals, with the clergy, service clubs, courts, and civic groups; our first institutional AA efforts; the assuming of responsibility (by the Central Committee) for supervision *and support* of the Central Office.

A year later, the Central Hollywood Group established a call board to supplement the day-time phone in the Central Office - a labor of love, manned by volunteers, that affords phone service from 5:00 P.M. to 9:00 A.M., and on Sundays and holidays. It is still in operation.

As AA grew by groups, the Central Committee, composed of delegate and alternate from each group, grew too unwieldy. Early in 1948, it voted to "streamline" itself; divided the area into 12 zones, all groups in each zone having a "group representative," from which



"FRIENDLY HOUSE:" 12th Step home for alcoholic girls; it sprang from a need, grew from love, hard work and prayer ...



FELLOWSHIP AT WORK: Our 12th Step House for men; it has given hundreds of beaten and discouraged alcoholics a new lease on life; offers lodging, meals, clothing, jobs —and, best of all, fellowship.



a "zone representative," (or Central Committee member) was chosen to represent all groups in his zone.

Minor flaws in this structure had become evident by the time the "Secretary's Handbook" was issued from New York in 1949. A General

Meeting, held in January, 1949, voted to accept, in spirit, the suggestions of the handbook, and the name of the Central Committee was changed to "Inter-Group Service Committee." Another step in the same direction was the forming,

this year, of the "Inter-Group Association," composed of a delegate from each group. Still following the 12-zone plan, this group, in November of 1951, elected a new panel of 12 committee members, six of which are to serve for two years, six for one year, with each year's election choosing six new members who will serve for one year.

Neatly parting our Intergroup efforts toward progress in the middle, a new responsibility fell in our laps early this year. The pamphlet on "The Third Legacy" reached us - "would we accept it?" — and like AA s everywhere, we were humbly grateful for the chance.

"Zone" experience proved valuable; taking in a larger area, we divided it into 16 districts, "sweated out" the book-work and correspondence necessary to gather the clans, and, miracle of miracles, completed sixteen simultaneous, separate district elections in the same room in 15 minutes! Yes, like AA s everywhere, we bicker, but when the common welfare is involved, and we need unity, we have it. But we did have help, for Bill was with us.

And, from this 16-man committee composed of "solid" AAs from Bakersfield to Indio, a new process of unifying the ranks of AA has developed, and now, for the first time, everyone in AA can learn of the structure of the Fellowship. The Foundation feeds information to our General Conference Delegate, who

passes it on to the other fifteen district representatives at State Committee meetings (or mails it or phones it, if it's in a hurry). They, in turn, pass it on to the groups in the district they represent. It's educational. For example, it is a safe bet to say that more people in our area know about the *Grapevine* than ever before - at least, more people are subscribers than ever before.

As with AA everywhere in large areas, our Central Office is our major nerve center. Into it come 99% of all calls from sick alcoholics or their friends, of calls for information on AA, of calls for speakers for AA groups and non-alcoholic organizations.

"The Office," as it is familiarly known, has on file the phone numbers of group secretaries, to whom it relays 12th Step calls according to the district from which the call comes. Inter-group information and liaison is a function of the Office; also a good deal of catch-as-catch-can public relations when the proper public relations committeeman cannot be located on a hurry-up matter.

Visiting AA s are welcomed, given information, and referred to groups or to other AAs; literature and books are made available to groups who do not buy direct from New York, as well as directories of meetings and our local "little brown pamphlet."

The Call Board, with its volun-

teers, coming on duty as it does in the evening, when the desperate alcoholic is most likely to be nearing his breaking point, frequently handles more calls than the Central Office during the day. Since 1949, it has been a part of our Central services.

Expenses of the Central Office are met by voluntary contributions from various groups. Service is exactly the same to groups who do not contribute as to those who do.

In the course of Bill's visit to Los Angeles in 1943, a discussion of the need for AA in institutions led to some fast action. Fired up with super-charged doses of AA, Bill, with members from both Northern and Southern California, made a trek to San Quentin, found a welcome from the warden, and held the first institutional meeting in California.

From that first carrying of the message to people behind bars, this particular branch of AA has received plenty of time and attention. Much of it (especially the hospital side) stems from Psycho Court — natural, since this dingy old room in our now obsolete General Hospital played such an important part in AA's first beginnings here.

A good deal of AA's public relations savvy is based on institutional work, since, in so many institutions, we had to tread with great circumspection in order to get one foot in the door.

Generally speaking, up to 1948, institutional AA had been on a hit-or-miss basis. A zealous group or a few zealous members, knowing of an institution housing alcoholics, would establish a meeting or a regular group, and these non-connected groups and meetings were in operation throughout Southern California.

In 1948, at the forming of the new "streamlined" Central Committee, one of the committee members was directly charged with the responsibility for supervising and expanding institutional AA, and putting it on a more organized basis.

In 1949, the first Institutional Plan of Operation was presented to the Central Committee, and upon its acceptance, a new committee was formed — composed entirely of people actually engaged in AA institutional work. The purpose of the committee was to provide a monthly meeting where those who sponsored or conducted AA groups in jails, prisons, road camps, state hospitals, sanitariums, and rest homes could gather to present their group's problems, and to exchange information and help. Another broad purpose was, of course, to see that any institution wishing AA might have a group, to see that groups were re-established wherever they had died by the wayside, and to help those in operation to remain in operation.

By a mild form of solicitation once a year, the Institutional Com-

mittee provides books, literature and directories to those groups which cannot pass the hat, and hence have no funds of their own— actually, a majority of the groups fall into this category.

One of the important sub-committees of the Institutional Group is the Psycho Court Committee. Two or more members of this committee sit in Psycho Court at every session, are given a list of alcoholic patients who will appear before the court, talk with the families of those up for commitment, and are permitted to visit the patients after the court hearing. "Follow through," which is the unwritten motto of the Institutional Committee as a whole has its best example in AA Psycho Court procedure.

A concise but complete report is taken on each patient committed, and this is sent to the head of the committee sponsoring a meeting at the institution where the patient is sent for the proverbial "care and treatment." Thus, the AA who regularly visits the institution knows about the new incoming patient in advance, can meet him as soon as he comes out of the receiving ward, and let him know that AA is there for him if he wants it, and that individual AAs are interested in his welfare.

As the work of AA committees and AAs have become better known to institution officials, more doors are opened to us, acceptance is quicker and more whole-hearted,

and more opportunities are given us for service.

One of our most fortunate opportunities for public relations work in this field was presented in the Fall of '49, when, by invitation, the Institutional Committee put on a "typical AA meeting" for the complete staff of the State Department of Mental Hygiene, in the State Building.

Meetings with associations of custodial officers and probation officers, opportunities for close work with city, county and state bureaus, thousands of personal contacts between responsible and sober AAs and the personnel of state, county and city jails and hospitals have produced an amiable climate of mutual respect in which both AAs and their old enemies, "the authorities," can help and be helped.

At County Jail, women members of AA now have the privilege of private interviews in the attorneys' rooms with women prisoners; one state hospital asked two women AA's to hold regular interviewing sessions with the families of alcoholic patients; AAs who have demonstrated their trustworthiness and selflessness are almost literally allowed the run of many maximum security institutions, both penal and medical. And these are only a few of many instances where increasing knowledge of, and confidence in, AA have broken down barriers and opened new channels

for getting the message to the sick alcoholic.

At present, more than 50 such institutional groups are in healthy existence, with well over 100 meetings per week. At Tehachapi, prison for women, at Chino, San Quentin's "southern branch," at the juvenile detention prison at Lancaster; at county jail farms, in city tanks, in county jails, at state hospitals, county farms, sanis, private hospitals, drying-out places, and rest homes, AA is available.

Some of our bright spots are the periodic parties at certain institutions — Christmas parties, anniversaries, dances, and such. Alcoholics liked to whoop and holler when they were lushing - and they still do when they are sober. And, to the alcoholic in an institution, usually resentfully considering the fact that *maybe* he ought to do something about his drinking, such parties are a reminder that, to quote the girl in the story, who indignantly refused a cigarette and a drink, but accepted an invitation to a little romance, "you *can* have fun without smoking and drinking!"

Since the days of the first Central Committee, we have been conscious of the value of public relations — and the danger of a faulty policy. Clinging to our tradition of growing by attraction rather than promotion, seeing that, when possible to control, any public mention of AA will be in the best traditions of anonymity, with prin-

ciples placed above personalities, AA in Los Angeles has been fortunate in avoiding embarrassing or injurious public mention.

Breaches of the tradition have been few and far between, and there have always been plenty of good AAs willing to explain to the transgressor firmly, if not always gently, the significance of tradition.

On the positive side, much progress has been made in establishing AA as a potent, a recognized, and an accepted force in the community. Our members are called upon to speak before civic groups, service clubs, church groups and congregations, industrial clinics, college classes on sociological and probation work, state, city and county medical and social workers, and before groups of many other kinds. There is probably no group interested in the problem of alcoholism that does not have at least one AA on its board.

A well known "public service" television show, some two years ago, invited four AA members to be guests — masked, of course. The tremendous interest and response has made AA a regular twice-a-year feature on the program. Other television appearances of AAs are fairly regular; many outstanding radio shows (dramatic, as well as participation and discussion) have made Alcoholics Anonymous a household word in Southern California; newspapers have found us sources of many human interest ar-

ticles. In general, our Public Relations Committee has been so successful in "selling" our tradition of anonymity that radio, newspapers and television deal with us enthusiastically but correctly, and without friction.

The deep need of the alcoholic to laugh and play, as well as to face the more serious factors in clearing away the wreckage of the past, have made clubs one of the natural corollaries to AA.

As in other areas, we have had our ups and downs, our discussion and dissension, our failures and our successes, where clubs are concerned. Of course, "clubs" (meaning social clubs) and "clubhouses" (meaning meeting places and service centers) are not always the same, although they frequently offer the same functional services.

In our area, a clubhouse may be owned by a group, (such as North Hollywood), or jointly by a number of groups in a sub-area (as in the Santa Monica Bay area groups). These clubhouses are used as meeting-places, service centers, and social clubs (dances, cards, etc.)

One of our "musts" for the visiting AA is the 6300 Club, purely a social club, and established as such, in accordance with the tradition — organized by individual AAs, but having no official connection with Alcoholics Anonymous or with any AA group. The 6300 Club does have meetings, but these meetings are held by outside groups.

The Club's facilities are readily available for any outside group; within the scope of its membership rules and house rules, its facilities and affairs are open to all AAs. As an organization, the Club has always been forward in supporting any worthy AA need — affairs to raise funds for the Central Office, for rehabilitation centers, and the Foundation, have been many.

Groups in all areas furnish their own social life — dances are a regular feature in AA; the AA picnic is a beloved tradition all over Southern California. You can organize an AA softball league at the drop of a first-baseman's mitt, and, in general, no alcoholic who joins AA in Los Angeles can complain that it's all work and no play.

To the highly controversial alcoholic, some things are more controversial than others, and "rehabilitation" — as a word, at least, if not as a principle — is one of them; principally, perhaps, because it smacks of regimentation, organization, administration, and *money*. But, when every 12th Step call, every quarter you slip a drunk, every time you sign a drunk out of hospital, pass on an old overcoat to a less fortunate brother, or find some a job, is, in essence, "rehabilitation," we will always have it in AA as a principle, no matter what we call it.

We have two shining examples in Los Angeles - the 12th Step House, for men, and Friendly House,

for women. They aren't "rehabilitation" in the dictionary, or social worker sense — they are *brotherhood*, and *sharing*, and *friendship*, and *encouragement*. The fact that these spiritual qualities are expressed in such earthy terms as shelter, food, clothing, and job-finding makes them no less spiritual.

Everything in AA had to grow from a need. The 12th Step House actually grew out of the AA meeting at the Midnight Mission, where some ex-winos who loved old practicing winos ached with the obvious need for a place to shelter men who otherwise would be sleeping behind billboards after the meetings were over.

Friendly House grew from the desperation and frustration felt by women AA s who faithfully held meetings in county and city jails, and who saw women prisoners, scooped up from Skid Row, released with no place else to go but back to East Fifth Street.

It isn't easy to raise money — in AA or out of it — for a worthy purpose. You can be sick of frustration before you get enough to crack the first month's nut. There probably weren't a hundred AA's in Los Angeles who would have bet even money that either of these two places would ever be more than a wistful dream. But take a quick look.

Using the 9-month period of April to December as a control, 12th Step House registered in 525

men, nearly 60 per month. They were offered a minimum of 5 days security, 10 days if they needed it, more in some cases. Many of them get drunk, of course, the next day, or drift away. But the house is always full. During that period, 472 men were completely outfitted with clothes — not new, but good, clean, and re-furbished. Thirteen hundred meals per month are served. There is a regular Tuesday night meeting, a Friday night "get-together" fellowship meeting — as a matter of fact, there's some kind of an AA meeting going on in some corner or other, from 6:00 A.M. to 11:00 P.M. Any man who is sober, who is in need, and who can bring any AA to attest that he *may* have some interest in staying sober is eligible. The house is full all the time, but there's always a couch to sleep on. Nobody pays a dime — *neither the "guest" nor his sponsor*. Contributions are welcomed, of course.

At Friendly House, in a good neighborhood not too far from Wilshire Boulevard, women alcoholics from jails and prisons are given not just comfort and shelter, but the atmosphere of a gracious home, and the friendship of women AA s who have made the place, as well as its guests, "their baby." Women's AA groups from all over L.A. alternate in bringing a Thursday night meeting to Friendly House; again, there's AA available in Friendly House on practically a 24-hour basis. *Again: nobody pays*

a dime — neither the "guest" nor her sponsor.

God knows where the money comes from. But He seems to help the devoted AAs who sparked these two houses to "get it up" somehow. Many a time there hasn't been a \$10 balance left at bill-paying time, and once in a while the book-keeping has to be delayed while last-minute, prayerful hustles bring in enough to nose out the red ink in a photo finish. But every day, more and more people become interested, and month by month, more solid AAs are showing up at outside meetings, and saying: "I got my first AA at Friendly House," or "I got sober at the 12th Step House."

Because, some 17 years ago, a drunk got the idea that he could perhaps stay sober by helping other alcoholics to stay sober, about 130,000 people are alive and happy today who didn't figure to be either if they hadn't sobered up. And knowing that this is so, the average AA member has hardly gotten the sawdust off his back before he wants to help the sick alcoholic who is still suffering to get up off the floor.

Aside from each individual's own seeking, there has never been, so far as anyone knows, any controversy or argument about the part that God (*as you understand him*,

naturally) has played in our recovery. Nobody pushes his God down any other member's throat — we're just the same about the "spiritual side" in L.A. as you are, wherever you are.

As one of our members says: "It works, by God! Yes, it works — **by God.**"

This isn't a story of AA in Los Angeles, because a story has, classically, a beginning, a middle, and an end. We've had a beginning, we're at some point, exact spot unknown, in our development. God willing — and we know He is — there'll never be an end.

At a meeting south of here, the other night, a deaf old ex-drunk, with an all too inadequately geared hearing aid, approached the speaker. After some preliminary shouting, lip-reading and sign language had established contact, the old man said: "Maybe you can tell me what I stumped the committee with — how do I stay sober when I can't hear a blankety-blank word?" He paused a minute, and then said, "I'll tell you why, young man. There's a *spirit* in this room that's a blankety sight more powerful than any words you can find for it!"

He's right. And we know you've got it in your meetings, wherever you are. God bless you!