

## THE BIRTHDAY PLAN

*Excerpts from a talk given by the originator of "The Oklahoma Birthday Plan," at the AA State Meeting in Great Bend, Kansas, last fall.*

I BELIEVE Bill and the founders in giving us the Third Legacy gave us everything we need to work AA and to perpetuate it, except a permanent way to finance ourselves. The \$2.00 a head suggested as a yardstick for group contributions to Headquarters sounds all right; but in my opinion a lot of us are "passing through" AA: 25 per cent of those in this room tonight will have "passed through" a year from now—sober, chances are, but not active—and new ones will be taking your places.

I have had an opportunity to look at this thing from a financial standpoint and I am worried. The seventy-five districts in the United States and Canada which send delegates to our General Service Conference every year have averaged about \$1500 a year in contributions.

On the twenty-eighth day of February in 1954 while attending a state meeting in Oklahoma City a fellow who knew I was interested in AA finances said to me: "What do you think of starting a voluntary individual birthday contribution to the New York office—a dollar for every year since first contact with AA, up to a top limit of \$10?" I received a great

inspiration from this suggestion and couldn't get it out of my mind. After being home a day or two I called seven or eight old boys who had "passed through" and gave them the thought. Every one of them was interested.

Then I called AA in Oklahoma City—where I'd first heard the idea—and got the same reaction. The boys in Oklahoma City started talking about it and I started talking about it and in July we decided to try it around the state. We also decided to back up and include the birthdays that had already passed during the year. The result was we sent to General Service Headquarters from Oklahoma, whose groups are below the average, almost exactly twice as much in 1954 as the year before. We continued to follow the plan in 1955, with even better results. And, at least 90 per cent of the old-timers are repeating their contribution.

The way we approach these old-timers is this: we ask them how they would like to do a little Twelfth Step work with money. I contend that as Americans we think in terms of money. If we can get the old-timers who are no longer active to make their

birthday contribution, it is a habit they won't forget and one that will remind them about the most important day in their lives.

We alcoholics are blessed with two birthdays: the first birthday God gave us life and a soul and on this birthday we receive gifts. Along came old John Barleycorn and misjudgment and we lost our soul; we lost it and we almost lost our life. Then this great philosophy of AA came along and through it we eventually found our soul, and for finding our soul we should give of ourselves in gratitude. My AA birthday is the most important day of my life. I have outlived my real birthday and I am living from my first contact with AA eleven years ago.

When these older guys and gals seven and eight years sober are asked if they want to do some Twelfth Step work with money they feel the same way. Under our plan we do not write letters, but when the second year rolls around we follow up and it gives us a chance to do some Twelfth Step work. I have come to the conclusion that it is just as important to reach the old-timer as it is to save the last boy or girl who comes through the door. If we do not save some of them then we are turning into a processing fellowship.

There are a few groups that are growing but most are still about the same size. The older ones are "passing through"; we get new members who are processed, and that is not good for AA. We should be grateful

for AA as long as we draw a breath, and we should do something to perpetuate this fellowship—we will let it go to the dogs if we do not find some plan to finance ourselves!

You might think I am kidding, that I am showing an over-amount of enthusiasm here, but I have been all over the country and have made about thirty-five talks and visited many, many groups. I find some enthusiasm, sure—but where are all the 200,000 or so who have "passed through"; what are they doing? We who are active in AA have the greatest responsibility that we have ever had in our lives: to try to reach the inactive old-timers.

To get back to the Birthday Plan: the idea is that you talk about this in your own group. The group doesn't vote on whether to accept the Birthday Plan—that's an individual, voluntary thing. It does vote on appointing a birthday boy or girl. On the first of the month the birthday boy or girl checks all the birthdays for the active and inactive members of the group. (Some groups make a lot out of birthdays while others do not.) He makes a list of all the birthdays, then studies the Handbook and the Third Legacy Manual enough to prepare a fifteen-minute talk.

The birthday contribution is voluntary. No one has to contribute. But the talk will at least educate the new member in AA and tell him something about the over-all job that we had failed to do until we started working under the Third Legacy (worldwide service). The birthday boy or girl

talks to John and Mary . . . John and Mary go to see Bill and Susie to tell them about this new way of doing Twelfth Step work with money . . . and you'll be surprised at the results.

I want you to remember how this inspiration came to me . . . by talking to these older members and to the new ones too. They want to do something; they want to be a part of this fellowship; they feel when they make a little investment that they are a part of it. And they are! Who is an AA? He doesn't have to go to meetings . . . an alcoholic who has a sincere desire to stop drinking is an AA if he says he is.

I hope you will all go home and do a little serious thinking. We have not gone to pieces yet but too many are "passing through" and we have to reach them some way. Bill W. has scratched his head and many of the active old-timers have tried to figure a way to reach the old guys and bring them back into AA. They haven't come up with anything yet.

God has been good to me . . . when this plan was dropped in my lap I was walking with a cane and the doctor had told me to go home and get my affairs in shape, and play gin rummy. I have been "talking the Birthday Plan" since last February 28th and I think I am in pretty good shape for nearly sixty-eight. God has given me health and has given me the "wherewith" to come and talk to folks like you, so I know God is in this thing.

The Birthday Plan may not be the answer but from this will come the answer because I know you folks are going to go home and look the facts squarely in the face. Get out the old Handbook that the gals at General Service Headquarters spend much time in compiling and go to studying it.

Do you know what generally happens to that book? It is sent to the secretary of each group and about the only time it is used is when someone inquires if there is a group located in such-and-such a place. Read the front part of this book—there is a lot of valuable information in it. Then get out the Third Legacy Manual and get to schooling yourself!

I have been to the General Service office in New York many times besides to attend the Conference meetings when I was a delegate. I know they are always on their toes when the Conference is in session, but as I say, I have dropped in many times. I was there at Bill's birthday dinner last year. Did you know they were \$40,000 in the hole? We came up with \$39,000 of it, and do you know where this money is coming from that we are short? It is coming from the sales of the Big Book, and did you know that the reserve up there is now less than \$100,000? It is a pity. What if there is a little depression? You can see why we are forced to look this situation squarely in the face: we have all got to come up with something permanent in order to finance ourselves.

We in Oklahoma are going to try to educate the new member as he comes into AA, and try to accumulate the necessary funds to do the things we should in order to run our Headquarters in New York with dignity—and we are "teasing" the old-timers back. It is all AA, every bit of it.

If there are any questions about the Birthday Plan and the three-year-plan we are going to start in Oklahoma, I'll be more than happy to answer them.

The experiment is working in Oklahoma, and I hope by the time your delegate goes back to New York to the next Conference he will have something great to report about the Birthday Plan. It has been working in many other states too.\*

We have made good progress. . . . I think it is the answer, and it is later than you think. We who are active in AA have a job to do, and our job is never done.

*Ab A., Tulsa, Oklahoma*

*\*Ed. note—we've been hearing murmurings and rustlings about the Birthday Plan for some time. Finally we decided to take a look at the mail and see just how far the idea had gone by word-of-mouth. We were amazed to come up with this (incomplete at press date) list of sixteen areas where groups are using the Birthday Plan: Arkansas, California, District of Columbia, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin and British Columbia. From seven other states (as of press time) have come individual Birthday contributions direct to General Service Headquarters, many of the accompanying letters inscribed "with love to AA": Florida, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey and West Virginia.*

