



Fragments of AA History

This is an excerpt transcribed from a talk on AA history given by Clarence S., originally of Cleveland, Ohio, and the founder of the first AA group in that city, which was in Clarence's own words, "the first AA meeting in the world" in the very purest sense, since preceding groups in both Akron and New York has been offshoots of Oxford Group meetings.

During his talk, Clarence described the effect of a series of articles on AA which ran in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* in October 1939 (see page 36): "Well, people came in so fast we were having an awful time trying to absorb them. . . . So I was trying to find out some way we could train these people in classes. I didn't have any money to rent a hall and I was trying and I was asking the good Lord to give me some direction on this, as we always ask him for direction on everything.

"So one day I went out chasing some of these [prospects] down and I had one in my hand there, by the

name of Walter B. And the guy says, 'Who?' I says, 'Walter B.' He says, 'Walter, oh Walter,' and then I knew I'm in the right place. He says, 'He's not in here, he lives up over the carriage house in the rear. You'll find him up there' Anyway, Walter comes to the door and he's very affable, very polite and very drunk. And he invited me in.

"So, I go in that place and, boy, one look at the place and it's a theater. What he's done, he got hold of about two hundred picture show seats from a show that went out of business and he has them stapled to the floor. And one end of his place is a stage with all the drops and props and he lives in the other end. And I look at that place. I'd been praying for a place to train people in classes"

Clarence then goes on to discuss Walter's getting sober and becoming what Clarence describes as a "captain in AA." Eventually, true to Clarence's vision, they began holding meetings to train people in the ways

and means of AA.

"We had those men coming up there every night of the week," Clarence continues. "And here's something that happened. The neighbors are wondering what's going on upstairs . . . behind that funeral home. All these men, a hundred or so, streaming up there every night. They know that something nefarious is going on up there. And they want to know what's going on in their neighborhood so they send the police over.

"So one evening the cops come and the sergeant comes in and I greet him at the door and ask him his pleasure. And he says, I want to talk to you about what are you guys doing up here. And he's looking around and he recognizes a lot of those birds in there because they had been customers of his in the wagon for year after year. And I says, 'In a term, we fix these guys. We sober them up.' And he says, 'You mean to say *that* one's sober, and *that* one?' I said, 'Go smell them . . . They don't drink. They ain't gonna drink. They'll never drink again.' Oh, what faith we had. So he turned and looks this bunch over and he left; there was nothing he could do.

"Couple of nights later a little old lady came charging up there and she wants to know what's going on in her neighborhood. It's full of these men and she recognizes some of these birds because she has been sweeping them off her lawn in the morning . . . and she wants to know and I told her the same thing I told the cop. 'You mean those guys are not drinking? *That* one and *that* one? No . . .'

"Then she softened up. She says, 'I have a boy. He's on the bum somewhere. Can you fix him, too?' 'Sure, we can fix anybody. Where is he?' She says he's in New York. Oh, whereabouts in New York. I don't know. He's on skid row. Skid row in New York, that's something to find . . . I says, 'Well I tell you, we got some guys up in New York . . . I'll get in touch with them.'

"She said, 'No, who do you have?' So I give her Bill W.'s name and address. And that lady's on the first rattler going to New York the next morning. And she confronts Bill, of course, but here's what happened.

"She had a daughter living in New York City. Now she hadn't heard from her son for about two years. He used to be a sales manager for one of the big distilleries. He was advertising manager for Calvert Distilling Company. I think he believed his ads too well and he wound up on skid row.

"The very day she landed in New York at her daughter's place this guy called his sister while his mother was there. What do you call that? She hadn't heard from him in a couple of years. What do you call that?

"So they got a hold of this bird. And you know what happened? He became the first editor of our Grapevine. He lived a sober life for many years . . . Wonderful fellow. He got married, beautiful wife he had; several years ago she died. I remember that so well. He just passed away a short time ago himself. These miracles that come along, that happen . . ."

Bruce W., Lauderhill, Fla.