



Fragments of AA History

The AA Preamble

The words contained in the AA Preamble are perhaps the most often repeated words throughout the AA Fellowship. Used to open many meetings around the world, the Preamble encapsulates the essence of AA's Traditions and gives an overview of the practices and principles so vital to AA life.

Yet, where did these words come from? Who wrote them, and why?

Following the first major surge of AA membership in the early 1940s, due in part to the Jack Alexander article about AA in the *Saturday Evening Post* and subsequent media stories about AA, there was an increasing and widespread interest in AA, both among potential candidates for the Fellowship and among those nonalcoholic family members, friends, and professionals who dealt with alcoholics in their daily lives. With the hope of providing a concise definition of AA for such interested people, the June 1947 Grapevine carried the original version of what

is now known throughout the AA world as the Preamble. It was written by Tom Y., the Grapevine's first editor, who borrowed heavily for the phrasing on the following paragraph in the Foreword to the first edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous*:

"We are not an organization in the conventional sense of the word. There are no dues or fees whatsoever. The only requirement for membership is an honest desire to stop drinking. We are not allied with any particular faith, sect or denomination, nor do we oppose anyone. We simply wish to be helpful to those who are afflicted."

The Preamble, initially referred to as "the AA Definition," took its place thereafter in each monthly issue of the Grapevine, and soon began to appear in Conference-approved literature and many other AA publications.

The phraseology from the Big Book regarding "an honest desire to stop drinking" as "the only require-

ment for membership" was carried over into the original wording of the Preamble. However, at the 1958 General Service Conference, a delegate asked about the words "honest desire to stop drinking," suggesting that since "honest" does not appear in the Third Tradition, it might be deleted from the Preamble. In discussion, most Conference members felt that as AA had matured, it had become almost impossible to determine what constitutes an honest desire to stop drinking, and also that some who might be interested in the program could be confused by that phrase. Who was to determine what was an "honest desire" anyway? Thus, as a part of the evolution of AA, the phrase had been dropped from common usage. The mid-summer meeting of the AA General Service Board ratified the deletion, and since then the Preamble has read simply "a desire to stop drinking."

At the same time, the phrase "AA has no dues or fees" was clarified to read as it presently does: "There are

no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions."

Over the years, as the Preamble caught on within the Fellowship and with nonalcoholic friends of AA, it has been translated into many other languages — Russian and Danish being the most recent. In addition, the Preamble has been used in television and radio public service announcements, has been adapted (subject to copyright approval) by many other "twelve step fellowships" as a concise definition of who and what *they* are. It has also been cited in many research papers, self-help books, masters theses, and has appeared in the occasional doctoral dissertation.

Such is the brief history of the AA Preamble — this shining beacon which draws so many sick and suffering alcoholics into its light. And no matter where the Preamble may end up, it will always be best known as the beginning of yet another meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is an honest desire to stop drinking... AA has no dues or fees... It is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution... Does not wish to engage in any controversy... Neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.