

October 1997




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## *Grays Harbor County, Washington*

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**I**t rains a lot in Grays Harbor County and that's a perfect excuse to drink. But there came a time when some Grays Harbor people desperately wanted to stop drinking but didn't know how. Then one day a friend approached them with the same problem and the same desire to stop drinking, and they began earnest discussions. In their talks around someone's kitchen table or in someone's front room, they began to realize the solution to the problem.

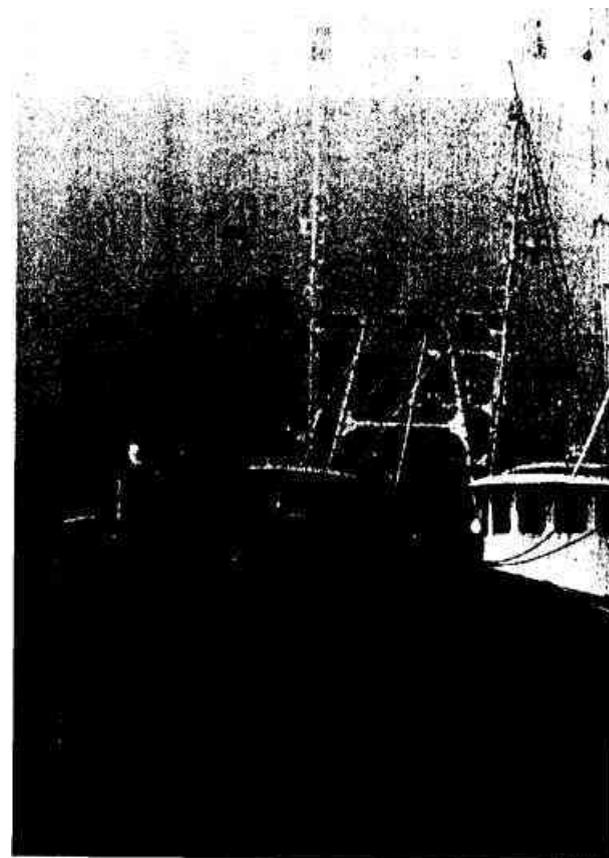
This was in 1950 and the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous was only fifteen years old and still in its fledgling stage. But an honest effort was made and a local chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous was begun with a few people and their spouses in attendance. Those first charter members — some of whom were Slim, Chuck, Frank, Virginia, Gordon, Bob, Joe, Vern, and Lois — met at the Emerson Hotel in Hoquiam. Shortly after, they moved into an abandoned store on Ontario

Street and met two nights a week. The group decided to call themselves the Grays Harbor Group. Those first meetings were held in drafty, sparsely furnished quarters with the members huddled around a pot-belly stove. Anyone interested in getting sober and staying that way was welcome to attend. But the most vital, interesting meetings were still those impromptu sessions held in the homes of friends. There was no Al-Anon in those days and the spouses, wives mostly, attended with their mates in order to get a genuine insight into the disease of alcoholism. These people were a very close-knit group and found comfort in sticking together and in frequent visiting between homes.

A group in Aberdeen met in the Washington Hotel but were more and more visited by Hoquiam members as there was a real need for more meetings. This merged group was first called the Aberdeen Grays Harbor Group; but amid heated debates, the name was

finally changed to the Aberdeen Group. The Hoquiam Group more or less evaporated at that time. This Aberdeen Group hosted an annual event such as a clam-chowder feed and a dance. There were many good times intermingled with the difficult times.

Aberdeen AA's next group was a room upstairs in the Zelasko Building



where the rent was twenty-five dollars a month. The dubious accommodations were next door to the rooms of ladies of the night, and the AAs once had their door assailed by boisterous loggers looking for "a good time." An AA wife was said to have been propositioned in the hall, much to her chagrin. But then considering the circumstances and the hard times, these episodes were understandable and tolerated. It was worth all the hassles and inconvenience just to be able to have those organized AA meetings and to share with like fellows.

There were at that time no detox shelters, treatment centers, or halfway houses; hospitals wanted nothing to do with the care and treatment of a common drunk. However, time and perseverance on behalf of the charter AA members led to a more decent care approach from local doctors and hospitals. AA members often sat with the suffering alcoholics through those first trying days of DTs and took every opportunity to discuss AA methods, the Twelve Steps, and the promises of a better life.

At that time, farther up country in eastern Grays Harbor County, the town of Elma started its own AA group. Hoquiam also began again with a very shaky membership — sometimes only four or five people. The group met three nights a week in the Presbyterian Church. In those days, the group's secretary opened up the hall and made coffee; if no one at all showed up, the

coffee would go down the drain and the door would be relocked. The Hoquiam Group had a very sporadic beginning but finally settled down into a workable unit.

Then in 1972, the Aberdeen Group moved to its present location on Heron Street. Remodeling was begun after the structure was found to be inadequate for the group's needs. A wall was removed, another bathroom installed, and a back room was added. A little later, a pool table and a television set were purchased after a poll of the group conscience. The pioneers of Grays Harbor County's various AA groups stuck with the program with boundless determination and they made it work.

Today there are many off-shoot groups which were formed from the first parent organization. These AA groups make up District 21 which includes all of Grays Harbor County with some slight overflow into surrounding counties. Alcoholics Anonymous now, has members who are court-ordered, while some are from our new local treatment facility. There are still many old-timers around and quite a few promising young people. We represent many ages, ethnic backgrounds, and job categories and are reassured that Alcoholics Anonymous will always be available to anyone, anytime, anywhere, as long as there is the honest desire to join the ranks of the recovering alcoholic.

*Romona B., Montesano, Washington*