I Won the Boxing Gloves
(and the Big Book)

An ex-delegate's story
of 20 years' AA service

My initial contact with AA was
through a doctor called to
attend me who pronounced my con-
dition as the "latter stage of acute
alcoholism." He doubted that he
could save my life, but was willing
to try provided I would stop drink-
ing. He stated emphatically that I
can't do it on my own, but that
AA might help. That was February
28, 1946. I have not had a drink
since.

Among the very few pieces of
AA literature available when I first
came were reprints of some Grape-
vine articles Bill had written (which
later became the body of our
Twelve Traditions). I read these
reprints and liked what Bill had to
say. The more I studied the articles
the more I seemed to understand
why the group I was attending was
having so many problems. The old-
timers there were not following Bill's
suggestions and they sure wouldn't
listen to me, a newcomer, when I
tried to talk to them about his ideas.
As a result of those arguments, be-
fore I was one year sober, I started
a group in my neighboring home
town so I could run it right!

By that time the original Twelve
Traditions pamphlet had been pub-
lished and we obtained enough
copies to give one to each group
member. We were determined to
follow the Traditions and, among
other things, scheduled a group
business meeting, on a night other
than our regular AA meeting so our
members could truly run the group
based upon the voice of the group
conscience. As "founder" I tried to
tell the members what the "voice" of
the group was and they literally beat
some AA sense into my head with
those Twelve Traditions pamphlets.

The next phase of my AA service
experience came when my group
sent me to represent them on our
local Central (Inter-group) Com-
mittee. At that time each group in
the area was sending a representa-
tive, and I became the 120th mem-
ber of the committee. That fiasco
reminds me of words in a GSO film-
strip about our literature, "Just
imagine any fifteen AA members
you know agreeing upon a single
page of anything about AA and you
know why it may take many months
to prepare one pamphlet." So it
was with our 120 member Central
Committee — we had personality
clashes galore. Fortunately none of
us "bleeding Deacons" bled to
death, and our central office sur-
vived in spite of our hassles.

Restudying the Twelve Traditions
pamphlet and using administrative
experience of the past, I put to-
gether a suggested plan for restruc-
turing our Central Committee. The
plan called for creating districts
throughout our area, having Group
Representatives within each district
meet together and select from
among themselves one to act as
District Chairman. The several Dis-
trict Chairmen would then meet as
a Central Committee and be a small
enough group to be effective.

The old-timers really screamed at
this newcomer's audacity in trying
to tell them what to do. One guy
told me I wasn't even an alcoholic
and should get out. I quickly saw
his problem and told him he ought
to get drunk so he could come back
as a newcomer and learn something.

I topped that by writing a fifteen
page letter to the Committee, detail-
ing how that guy was not only viol-
ating every Tradition, but not
working the Steps, either; recom-
manding that he be kicked out for
the good of the movement.

Before mailing the letter, I wanted
my sponsor to be the first to read it
and to see how smart I was. My
sponsor read the letter, then after
several minutes of, for me, uncom-
fortable silence said, "You sure
wrote yourself a letter, didn't you
Bud?" And so I had. My first
written inventory! Everything I'd
charged to the old-timer was really
one of my own shortcomings. A
continuing written inventory is still
very necessary for me. (Of course,
I didn't mail that letter.)

About a year later the Central
Committee was reorganized using
the essence of my suggested plan,
but providentially they changed the
"Districts" to "Zones" and the plan
has seemed to work fairly well.

I say "providentially" because
shortly after that, Bill came out to
talk to us about something called
Third Legacy which would require
us to divide our area into "districts." Most of us didn't know what Bill
was talking about, partly because
we didn't know what the first two
legacies were. Our First Legacy was
the AA Book containing the pro-
gram of personal recovery. Our
Second Legacy was the Twelve Traditions embodying the personal program for group unity. The Third Legacy was the transfer of the founders' personal responsibility for World Services. Look at the AA emblem: a triangle within a circle. The three sides of the triangle represent RECOVERY, UNITY and SERVICE. The circle indicates to me these three are inseparable. Without any one of them the other two might soon be lost.

By 1950 we had our first election for a General Service Delegate. Many of us believed we understood the reason for the Third Legacy Plan. Dr. Bob was gone; we knew Bill was perishable and besides, no two or three people could possibly maintain contact with the hundreds of groups throughout the country and properly carry their wishes to the General Service Board. Such linkage simply had to be forged; failure to do so might have been the death of AA.

It was then I came to realize the importance of learning the history of AA. Without knowing what had gone before, how could I possibly assume my responsibility to AA now and in the future?

The best single source of that history is the book, AA Comes of Age, one of the most exciting books I've yet read. And don't overlook the Third Legacy Manual and Twelve Concepts for World Service, vital AA literature for every AA member.

In 1947 a move to start a club in our area took shape. I was among those who aided the Committee and became a charter member. I served a couple of terms on the Board of Directors and was later given the dubious honor or serving as club President and Chairman of the Board. That club has since been dissolved; not because it was mismanaged, but because it was no longer needed by enough people to be supported properly. And that seems to be the key to an AA service. Is it needed? If it is, then provide it we must. Conversely, when a service is no longer needed, personal feelings must not interfere with our responsibility to drop it.

That is one reason for the Tradition which suggests outside aids of genuine use to AA should be separately incorporated and managed. The groups can quickly drop support if such aids become useless or interfere in basic AA work.

During my term on our local Central Committee it was my privilege to assist in the formation of our area's first Institutional Coordinating Committee. Several of our more responsible members had been conducting meetings in various institutions around the area before I got sober. We became aware of the need to coordinate those meetings when newer members, who knew nothing of the existing institutional efforts, attempted to "start" AA where in fact it was already going well. We began a listing of the institutional groups, a contact name or two for each, and from that simple beginning our present effective Institutional Committee evolved.

In 1950 my group selected me to be their General Service Representative (GSR). I took part in the election of our first delegate and attended all his assembly meetings, sincerely trying to carry the message of World Service to my group. In the Spring of 1952, after the General Service Conference, our delegate asked for suggestions on how we could better carry the story of World Service to all AA members in our area. I suggested that we have a conference in the L. A. area to talk about services. The suggestion was accepted, and, as usually happens, you offer a good idea and you are appointed chairman of the committee to get it done. By the time we had our second planning session, AAs in several cities outside the L. A. area indicated they wanted to take part also.

Thus it became a Southern California Conference and the first one was held in Long Beach in November in 1952. We had a lot to learn. The So. Cal. Panel One Assembly was tied into that affair for a couple of years, but we cut that out when we realized that So. Cal. Panel Two people were also at the Conference and weren't much interested in our hassles with delegate elections. As I recall, we didn't get around to talking much about World Services until 1960. Since then World Service meetings have been an important part of our annual conclaves, now more properly called convention. That name change was made because too many of our people confuse it with the General Service Conference meeting held in New York each April.

During the 1950-1951 period, I got the idea I'd like to have the Twelve Steps and short form of the Twelve Traditions in each piece of AA literature as a convenience when making Twelfth Step calls. I talked to my group members about that during one of our business meetings. They liked the idea, so I took it on to the Area Assembly meeting, where it was again endorsed. Our delegate took the idea to the 1952 General Service Con-
ference; the Conference liked it and since then all Conference approved literature has contained the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

I made a small map of our area and a service structure chart in 1952, which I often used when sharing my experience with others. In 1955 our delegate asked me to prepare a large map of our area. (The Third Legacy Manual suggests that you cannot properly conduct an assembly without one, but we had ignored that suggestion for five years.) The map was prepared and it was a great source of further AA service education for me. In 1960 that map was lost and I was again asked to prepare one. I became known as the guy who loved maps.

In 1962 I again served as a GSR and was selected as District Chairman. In 1963-64 it was my privilege to serve as delegate for my area. The outgoing delegate suggested that the five California delegates should have a sharing session, so I wrote them all and we started a delegates meeting which has now become an annual get-together, held during the Spring Conference of the Northern California Council. This is a valuable aid in having well-informed servants at the April General Service Conference.

At the 1963 General Service Conference, my first one, I was almost obsessed with the desire to speak on every subject brought to the floor; a real "mike" hog. At the end of each Conference, the man and woman delegate adjudged to have contributed most to the Conference are presented with an AA Book inscribed by Bill. I was given a special award: a pair of boxing gloves! I believe they said, "to protect his hands when he grabs the microphone."

After returning home, my wife Janet, a staunch member of Al-Anon, showed me an article written by Admiral Rickover, which contained a prayer I've since adopted. It goes like this, "Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject. Release me from craving to straighten out everyone's affairs. With my vast store of wisdom and experience, it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end."

My complete lack of humility permits me to tell you that after the 1964 Conference I was the man delegate given the AA Book inscribed by Bill. I've permission of my former assembly members to retain custody of that Book for them. They really earned the Book, they taught me to be a trusted servant. (I keep the boxing gloves with the Book, as an important reminder.)

This sharing of my experience is not meant to impress you with my excellence as a servant. Conversely, many who have been in AA less time than I served much more. Rather, I hope my story may move you to doing those things that need doing without waiting for "them" to do something. Remember, World Service isn't "them." World Service is you! Millions of drunks will die without ever hearing the message of AA if we do not assume our responsibility for AA's World Service. I realize that not every AA member can have the opportunity to serve in all phases of AA service work, but each of us can "light one candle rather than curse the dark." We can become responsible.

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