

June 1958

## A Year Later...

**An outgoing (56-'57) Conference Delegate wrote the letter below to the incoming "freshman" (58-'59) team at our request, back in January. Although its view is of the '57 Conference, its spirit and meaning are of the kind which never become "dated."**

PERHAPS YOU ARE FEELING just as I did a couple of years ago along about now [Bud wrote in January].

My name had been drawn from the "hat" at our December meeting, and now I was about to embark upon the most memorable experience that can happen to an AA.

As the middle of April approached and the great day came nearer I became more fidgety and nervous than ever. I was filled with a holy zeal to get to the Conference and start conferring. *This* delegate was prepared! You see, my brothers, I had ideas, and the top brass were going to listen to a thing or two from Southern California. After all, didn't we have the greatest concentration of AA manpower in the world right here in Southern California? Didn't California dollars just about keep this wonderful fellowship of ours solvent?

After thoroughly studying the Third Legacy Manual, all the previous Conference Reports, and every speech delivered by Bill and Bernard Smith (then Chairman of the Board of Trustees) —very neatly using some of their innocent remarks to bolster my case—didn't I, personally, arrive at the only logi-

cal solution to the ever-present question as to whether or not we should change the ratio of alcoholic and non-alcoholic members on the Board of Trustees? Didn't my groups agree unanimously that this very profound and perhaps divinely wrought solution might be the answer to all the ills besetting Alcoholics Anonymous? Didn't they commission their delegate to champion this cause?

The voice of the multitudes was finally to be heard, although I am quite sure that no one of the multitude had bothered to read the rather long and very dry report that I had issued on the question. Anyway, it was high time some guy took a close look at some of those jokers on the Eastern seaboard. I would be able to tell, in short order, which of them was "living it up" at our expense.

Like most Milquetoast characters harboring pompous ideas but being a little too introverted to be a true candidate for stuffed-shirt-dom, I get a little panicky when the chips are down. When the big day came, I crept into the East Ballroom of the Commodore Hotel hoping that no one would notice while I registered.

My wife and small daughter were with me, and it was my little girl, Beverly, who gave me away.

I was pretending to be engrossed in one of the many AA exhibits in the room, when a tall, lanky individual moseyed over and struck up a conversation with my attractive youngster. Finally, I had to acknowledge his presence. He introduced himself as Bill W. and quickly put us at our ease. He is, as you may know, the eldest of all our elder statesmen.

Fortunately for Bill, he passed my critical inspection. He looked neither seedy nor particularly prosperous. He had an easy way about him, and, as I was to learn, he doesn't get particularly perturbed about anything that may come up. "Doin' it easy," describes Bill.

The next morning with Hustling Hank G. in the chair, the Conference was off to a flying start right on time. Remarkable man, this Hank. Some one will write a book about him someday. Hank had all the information in his head and was able to answer most questions to everyone's satisfaction. Under his direction, all business sessions of the Conference unfolded smoothly and effortlessly.

It was at the first morning session that I began to acquire a different feeling about the Conference. My ideas as to why I was there were undergoing a change. It was after we had adjourned for lunch that I realized how embarrassed I was when someone mentioned my state's

numerical and financial strength. I'd found myself wishing some other delegate had risen to say, "So what?" Whether or not the ratio of the members on the Board was changed now—or never—didn't seem so important anymore. It was important, however, that the AA Big Book be translated into Norwegian and into the language of any other country on the globe where someone was ready and anxious to carry the message. It was important that the man who traveled from South Africa and the man from Puerto Rico be listened to and encouraged and made to feel assured that our services were in good hands. It was important that they go home knowing that our Traditions are being jealously guarded.

In the short space of two hours, I had begun to absorb something that I find difficult to describe. If you have ever driven home from your group meeting with that feeling that God is in His heaven and all is right with the world, you may have an inkling of what possessed me.

That morning I had witnessed something that to me—a scarred veteran of the intergroup wars—was nothing short of miraculous. After considerable discussion, a vote was taken on the question, as I recall, as to whether or not certain service office personnel should be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenditures in connection with some of our AA business. There were some 100 affirmative votes and eight negative. Since there was some op-

position, according to Conference practice it was decided to table the motion until a future day. Just that simple! Now, six of the eight voting against the motion were the very ones who stood to be reimbursed, had it carried. Asked why, they stated that they just might be helping to establish a precedent that could prove harmful to AA.

Some of us were quite indignant at that time over a rather flagrant break of anonymity at the level of the national press and motion pictures. One after another delegates rose to denounce in ringing tones such dastardly practice, and what was the Conference going to do about it? After listening to one or two older service office people who had been coping with just such problems for years, we decided we weren't going to do anything about it. The Conference Report for that year mentions the incident, and it is simply disposed of with this motion: "It is regrettable."

At all sessions of the Conference when it appeared that there was opposition to some measure about to be adopted, it was quickly tabled and we went on to something else.

"Tyranny of the Majority"?—not here. How often did I hear it stated during those days and nights, "Let's listen to the guy. He just *may* be right." Strange music to these ears that have listened at many an AA tribal council where the war chant has been, "Robert's Rules of Order says I'm right," or "I demand a recount."

When it's all over and you have made your final inspection of the physical facilities of our world service office; when you have made friends with each of the staff members who carry such a burden of AA detail on their lovely shoulders; when the last Trustee's hand has been wrung; when you have seen with your eyes the multitude of services performed in order that the message will continue to be carried world wide; when you have convinced yourself that the profits alone from the sale of the books are not enough to carry the load and that it will always require help from back home; and when you have said goodbye for the last time (you can't come back, you know—two years and you've had it) and you are on the way to the plane, you'll want to turn back and see if there aren't some strings somewhere that could be pulled somehow to let you come back next year. There aren't.

On the way home you'll have mixed feelings of despondency and a sort of elation. Despondent that never again will you meet with these friends from all over the face of the earth, yet strangely elated that you, an ex-drunk, have played just a tiny part in helping to shape the policy and safeguard the future of something given to us that we want to live forever. May this gift save the sanity and lives of those tens of thousands yet to come, even as it did for you and me.

*Bud S., San Diego, California  
(56-'57 Conference Delegate)*