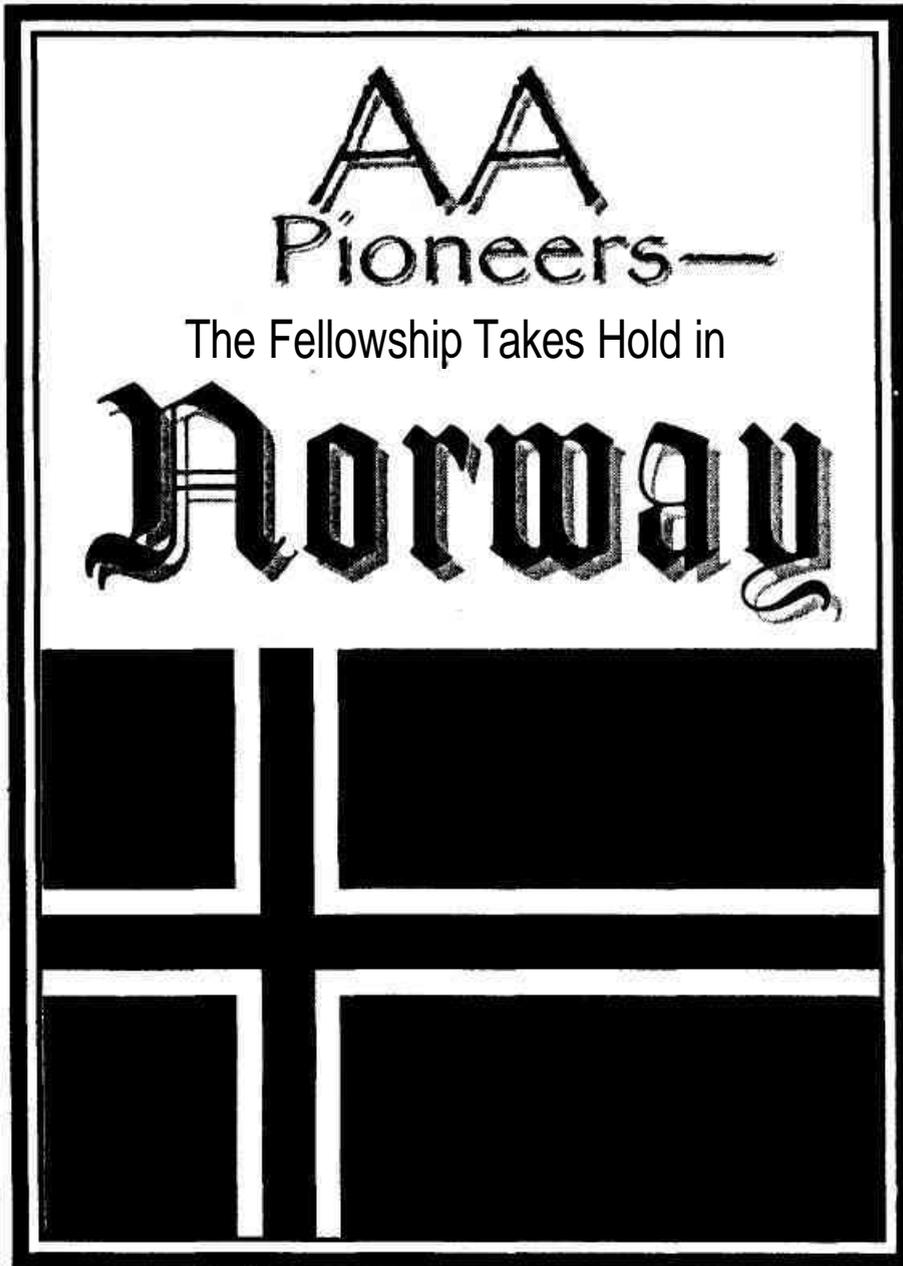


October 1997



April 7, 1997, marked AA's fiftieth anniversary in Norway. The event was celebrated with candlelit closed meetings all over the country. Two larger celebrations were held in May, one official and one internal for AA members. At the official celebration in Oslo, AAs met the officials of Norway, including the minister of social affairs, and the media. There were speeches and entertainment. Two days later, AA members assembled at a conference in Beitostolen. The theme was "Faith, Hope, and Victory."

How it began in Norway

In 1946 there lived a modest Norwegian, George, in Greenwich, Connecticut. He had emigrated from Norway some years earlier and owned a coffeeshop. He was an alcoholic, but he had gotten sober in AA in the early forties. Then he heard that his brother Fredrik in Norway was having great problems with alcohol, and George decided to help him. He sold his coffeeshop and together with his wife returned to Oslo to help his brother. It was very difficult to get his brother sober and even harder to get him to understand what AA was about. George almost gave up when his wallet was nearly empty. But just before he went back to the United States, his brother asked him for a last meeting. Fredrik said he saw at least a hope of reaching what had gotten his brother sober. He was beginning to understand

what AA was all about. George had planted a seed, but had to go back to the States and didn't personally see the concrete results of his work.

Fredrik advertised in a newspaper and after a while he met Gunnar, who grabbed the message of AA with desire. They started working, and George sent some literature from AA headquarters in New York. At about the same time there were some patients at a health clinic a short distance from Oslo who started a club of friends. Three of the members, Arnold, Gustav, and Erling, wanted to find a permanent solution to their alcohol problem, and they read some AA literature. When they came back to Oslo, they came in contact with Fredrik and Gunnar, and on April 7, 1947, these five men started the first AA group in Norway. They called the group Janus 2.

At about the same time something was happening in another Norwegian town, Bergen on the west coast. It was developing without any connection or knowledge of what was happening in Oslo. Hans had many years of alcohol problems behind him in the spring of 1946. He met a seaman at a clinic where he was for the second time. This seaman gave Hans some pamphlets he had gotten in New York. Hans read the material with great interest and contacted AA headquarters in New York and got more literature. At this time he worked alone, but after a while he met three men who had heard of AA

at a clinic. Together they started the first group in Bergen, in March 1948. They called their group Anoaal.

Period of growth

After some time, several groups were started in Oslo and Bergen. The members in the two towns learned about each other. At the first anniversary on April 7, 1948, they took a survey and found that AA membership in Norway was 200. Most of the members lived in Oslo and Bergen, but after a while the movement spread over the whole country. The first AA members in Norway worked very hard to spread the message in contact work, group meetings, and information meetings. They traveled around and started groups in

different towns.

A great thing happened in 1950: Bill W. visited Norway. His visit was a strong stimulus to AA in Norway and the source of great publicity. In early 1950, AA in Norway was blooming. In a few years the total number of groups reached sixty, and the movement was mentioned positively by the press. There were held great information meetings, press conferences, and interviews on radio. But everything was not idyllic. The pioneers in Norway were flying blind, trying and failing as they debated questions of money, prestige and anonymity. Self-support was a new concept in Norway at this time. We sought and got economic support from outside institutions, including the gov-

ernment. But the pioneers in Norway contacted the headquarters in New York and took the stand that AA has to base its activity on its own economic resources. Since then self-support has been just as important as anonymity.

As clinics were established around the country, alcoholism treatment improved. Many AA members, as private persons, went into the work to establish more clinics.

AA membership grew rapidly in the fifties. Although AA kept no records, we read from newspaper articles that AA had 5,000 members.

Building a service structure

Gradually, an AA service structure was formed. A monthly magazine began as

well as a board for the whole country. The first meeting was held in Stavanger in 1951. In the seventies, the first service conferences with delegates from the whole country were held. The structure in Norway included committees at different levels.

It was not before 1970 that AA in Norway got a service office. In the beginning it was run by volunteers, but in 1990 it acquired a paid staffer with an office in Oslo.

Today we have about 2,000 AA members in twenty regions which work for the common interest. Membership should be higher. Alcoholism is one of the biggest problems in Norway. This is our challenge.

Thar W., Kristiansand, Norway