

November 1972

Pioneering days

From Inglewood, Calif.:

The writer arrived in AA the weekend of July 4, 1939. It was still holding meetings in the homes of the Oxford Group. Soon after, we all started to meet on Sunday at an AA's home. Besides our very small membership, about twelve or fifteen including Bill W. and our nonalcoholic friends, we had patients from Rockland State Hospital join us. Bridge, AA yakking, and a good potluck lunch were enjoyed.

Next, one of our members arranged for us to hold our Sunday meeting at the South Orange, N.J., Community House. This was real nice. Those of us who were alone could come out to the park and witness an amateur baseball or football game in the afternoon until others came for the meeting, which was around 5:00 or 6:00 PM. The ladies would prepare a lunch in the clubhouse. All would be advised what food to bring by a chairwoman appointed from time to time by the nonalcoholics (Al-Anons now). There we would hold our meeting, with Bill, of course, discussing AA problems and letting us have the latest information relative to the growth of AA. Most of the action then was in Ohio, and Bill always had many interesting stories to relate to us regarding those he knew in Ohio.

We were still so small that we could not afford to rent a meeting hall. We paid only a token amount to South Orange — one dollar per month, I think — as our traditions (then forming) would not allow us to accept it free of charge.

Some thought, because there were several of us who were alone (not married), we should be able to have a midweek meeting. Sometimes, it would be a week or two before we would see other AAs. As a result, we got permission to meet in an unrented apartment in New York City, from a member who had a connection with a realty company. We had the use of this apartment for about three weeks before it was rented. Then another member allowed us to meet in his tailor shop. It was full of ironing and cutting tables. We held quite a few meetings there. Bill was still the center of the meeting. Occasionally, he would ask one of us to talk.



We had to climb upon one of the tables so we could be seen by those standing.

After two or three months, someone backed the group, and we rented a small room at Steinway Hall. We now had an address we could give out with the certainty that a meeting would be held there every Tuesday. The first night we were in Steinway Hall, we expected Bill to lead the meeting as usual, but he declined. He told us we now had a group and should decide among ourselves just how we were to manage. We got one of our members to lead or act as chairman. When he closed the meeting, he asked me to lead the next Tuesday. After the second meeting, I asked my sponsor to act as chairman the next week. This is the way it was handled, and all were brought into service.

We next moved to our clubhouse on 24th Street. Our first chairman found it for us.

I am one of the most fortunate ones. I drank again on the weekend of Memorial Day, 1942, but got back after two hard years of inexcusable drinking. I returned to Los Angeles the weekend of Labor Day, 1944. Will have my twenty-eighth AA birthday this coming Labor Day.

G. E.