

January 1945

Points of View: Arkansas Style

Arkansas "Moon" brings on a peculiar kind of mean insanity, fearsome in its throes even to our horny-toed hillsmen. Four of our first seven A.A.s had to be lassoed and hauled out of caves where they had been living with panthers and bears. Two of the other three were easily taken: our local founder dug them up out of the sod - incorrectly diagnosed. The founder himself was a screwball trumpet player from one of the state's oldest, most revered families - fundamentally incapable.

A perfect foundation for an A.A. group.

It all began on March, 1949, in the mind and heart of a Little Rock (trumpet playing) insurance executive, an alcoholic who had been dry for five years after reading Peabody and practicing an unlabelled brand of A.A. He had had very little success with fellow alcoholics and when he read the first notice of A.A. he went for the book.

He roped in a furniture salesman (without wares) and a broken down (young) newspaperman who had buried himself (for keeps he thought) deep in the oblivion of the State Hospital for Nervous Diseases.

These pioneers in what Bill calls the "mail order section" went to local newspapers and obtained a modest notice in each; rented a Post Office box; began contacting ministers, police and court officials, and exploring flophouses, poolrooms, courts.

Business was brisk.

Within a few weeks the membership included 25 men and two women.

The troubles began early. Some of the men got the idea that they had joined a wet nursing organization and proceeded to turn it into one; the women turned out to be less alcoholic than unattached. One by one the members sloughed off.

Results: three months after founding, four charter members remained, two shaky.

At this time, prospects were given only the book, the weekly meeting, the offer of association, and were more or less on their own. One of the charter members drafted a program which, after several overhauling dietrated by tryouts, became known as The Little Rock Plan, or the Approach Program. The sole motive behind it was to improve effectiveness of the group's service to alcoholics.

It is a big dose, a rough assignment, highly controversial among groups familiar with it. It has served the Little Rock group well. We like it. (Detailed information will be furnished upon request.)

Out of the application of the Approach Program came the sponsorship system: one veteran and usually a young neophyte conduct a prospect through the program, which requires a minimum of two weeks of the prospect's full time.

We now have a membership in Little Rock of approximately one hundred; a women's group under our wing and meeting with us weekly; a swell club room establishment; and several branches in smaller Arkansas cities including Camden, where an even dozen from Little Rock now work for the Navy.

Four paramount lessons learned:

You can treat the spiritual phase any way you choose in the group as a whole, but sooner or later it becomes dominant in all the group's activities. In the beginning the group gave this phase very little house. It's the big motivation now, accepted, recognized, revered, held in awe.

For his own good you mustn't coddle a prospect.

Slips? We're now on our 'steenth policy and system for coping with slips. All have worked in some cases, failed in others.

But, then, we think: something is wrong if the group doesn't periodically have its troubles and problems.

Bud G., Little Rock, Arkansas