



The North Hollywood Group

Los Angeles AA groups began springing up during the early forties. Meetings were held on West Seventh Street and Wilshire Boulevard: quite a drive from the San Fernando Valley in the days of gas rationing. "Willing to go to any length," the early AAs traveled wherever there were meetings in Southern California by pooling gas coupons and riding together in one of the few automobiles that the members possessed. The comradeship enjoyed outside the scheduled meetings was crucial to these men and women. In those days, alcoholics were ostracized; alco-

holism was viewed as shameful and disgusting due to ignorance about the disease.

"My brother Jack and I used to stand out in the hall, like kids do, and listen to the AA meetings going on in my parents' house," Bob D. remembers. Sober for thirty-six years, Bob fondly recalls eavesdropping on those early meetings held in his parents' house on Hinds Avenue in North Hollywood. This was the birthplace of the North Hollywood Group, the first AA group in California's San Fernando Valley. "I was about nine years old, and these men were in the front room smoking

cigarettes and eating sandwiches and drinking coffee while my brother and I were peeking out this door and seeing what they were doing, what they were talking about." They were talking about sobriety. Mick C., Frank D., Bud E, Fay L., Carrol "Scotty" S. and a handful of other area men and women had begun holding AA meetings in their homes during the spring of 1941. Bill W. wrote a letter to Frank D. in September 1941. His encouragement — "complimentary reports about your particular group" — helped inspire the new group to continue. Less than a dozen men and women were the first members; they went from home to home, and as word of the group began to spread, the membership grew.

"The ones who began it," says Bob "were people who, like my father, were going to Los Angeles every Friday night. And then gas rationing came along, so they started some meetings in North Hollywood and it just blossomed after that. Those were the days if you went out three times you couldn't come back."

By 1942, membership had grown and the meetings were moved into a small stucco building in North Hollywood Park near Chandler and Tujunga. The young Fellowship was expanding. Softball games were played before meetings; potluck dinners, all-night poker games, and banquets were regular events for the members and their families. In 1944, Alcoholics Anonymous of North Hollywood was

incorporated in the state of California.

"Good luck on the Clubhouse," Bill W. responded, bestowing his best wishes in a letter to Chairman Tom O. written in January 1945. "The first AA clubhouse, as such, is to be built by the North Hollywood Group," announced the Grapevine, "on Chandler Boulevard property that is now theirs . . . North Hollywood AAs are going to build a clubhouse of their own . . . and are underwriting their venture through the sale of 'sobriety bonds.'" More than 250 "Sobriety Bonds" were bought by members purchased for ten dollars each. None of the bonds was ever cashed in.

By 1946, the huge number of alcoholics searching for sobriety swelled the membership of the North Hollywood Group. Jack P. explains that "a lot of the early people who attended North Hollywood came from the Los Angeles group . . . there were so few groups at that time." They quickly outgrew their new clubhouse on Chandler where parking had become a problem. The solution was found at the end of the block at 4343 Radford Street.

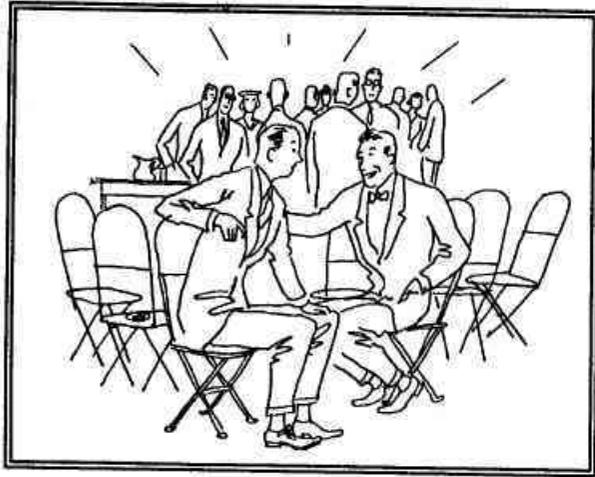
Jack P. recalls the clubhouse "rules" that existed before Traditions Two, Three, and Nine were drafted in 1946. "They would put a couple of guys at the door and ask some new guy if he wanted to 'stay sober on an all-time basis'." If the guy hesitated, or said 'I don't know,' they'd tell him to come back 'when you're ready to do it on an all-time basis.' That was the idea that

newcomers were given back then: this is where you come to stay sober, not to learn how to drink." Getting sober and believing that if he drank again he would die, Jack celebrated fifty years of sobriety on September 16, 1996.

Radford, as it became internationally known, was a grateful man's gift for his wife's sobriety: Alcoholics

Anonymous had worked where nothing else had. His generous donation allowed the group to arrange a trade — the modern one-story \$10,000 building on Chandler for the former schoolhouse owned by a church on Radford. Bruce G. remembers that "AA meetings were held in the building at 4343 Radford prior to the purchase of the property." The North Hollywood Group began holding meetings there in March 1946, and purchased the property in March 1947 for ten dollars.

Evelyn Alabam' C. got sober in December 1952, and until her death in 1991, served as an example of Alcoholics Anonymous and a much-loved "ambassador" of the Radford Group. Alabam' recalled North Hollywood Group members telling her about attending school in those very rooms, later returning there to recover from alcoholism.



The Radford family continued to grow. Fellowship, camaraderie, fun, and laughter attracted newcomers, who stayed when they found the solution to their problem with alcohol. Others came to carry the message. Some we remember: Larry B., Mary C., Big Jack, and Morrie S., who coined the phrase "Keep coming back." Thousands more remain anonymous. In November 1971, the name of the group became official.

"Radford was a good spot for people," says Bud H., a member since 1949. "I still think it's the greatest thing there is." Albertine R., sober since 1951 and who once sponsored Alabam', expresses "gratitude for being in that group ... it was a tough group." Calling the North Hollywood Group a "rough bunch," Fred H. puts it very simply: "If anyone really wants sobriety, they'll do whatever it takes."

Betty T. agrees: "My first meeting was the men's stag meeting — I came in drunk."

Bruce G. wrote in 1977, "The benefit to the community from the North Hollywood Group is beyond estimation. The number of men and women who have gone through that group, became sober through the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous, and maintained their sobriety over the years probably exceeds 400,000." "Walking miracles," Alabam' called them. By 1978, the active members numbered more than 300.

During the late 1970s residents and neighbors of 4343 Radford began voicing concerns about the AA club at the end of the street. Once begun, the contest between the AAs and the residents continued for the next seventeen years. It was a struggle which cost the Radford Group dearly. While the

legal and monetary expenses were large, they were not as damaging to the group as the threat and fear that the group would be destroyed. It wasn't.

In November 1994 the North Hollywood Group closed its doors at 4343 Radford and moved north to Victory Boulevard where the spirit of recovery continues today. As in families, people have moved on and passed on. The voices of experience are harder to hear today, but the message of hope can be heard by any who choose to listen.

Every man and woman who walks through the doors searching for recovery from alcoholism at the North Hollywood Group is in a line with the thousands who came before — whether or not they lived and died sober. We are grateful for their experience.

*Linda H.,
North Hollywood, California*