

THE YUKON STORY

I contacted A.A. by letter in response to an advertisement in the personal columns of The Vancouver Sun newspaper on January 2, 1948. A member of the Kingsway Group, one of the early groups in Vancouver, called on me three days later after which I became a member of that group.

I do not remember the name of the member who called on me. However when I attended my first meeting I met Granger, who had sent him to see me and I relied on his friendly counsel and encouragement thereafter.

I was a major in the army at that time. On March 1, 1949, I was notified that I would be transferred to Whitehorse to become senior mechanical superintendent of the highway system.

By coincidence, the night that I informed Granger of my pending move, there was a woman from Whitehorse at the meeting. She was not a member of A.A., but was visiting her brother-in-law, Bill, who was a member of the Kingsway Group, and had accompanied Bill and his wife to the meeting. I spent some time with her and established a contact to refer to. She was very interested in A.A. as her father, Boyd, had become a hopeless drinker.

I arrived in Whitehorse on March 10 for a three-day orientation visit with the man I was replacing, Jim B. He was in hospital, having broken his leg the day before my arrival while on an extended binge. I knew him well from overseas and had been on many drinking escapades with him.

I went to the hospital that evening to spend some time with him. He gave me a warm, friendly greeting and immediately produced a mickey. When I told him I had not touched the stuff for 14 months, he was most interested. The three hours I was with him was not spent discussing work. Jim never opened that mickey.

The following evening I returned to the hospital, taking the pamphlets, *Who Me?*, and *This is A.A.*, which at that time was fairly large and was a convincing piece of literature, with which any alcoholic could identify. That night I spent another three hours with him.

The next day I returned to Vancouver, and a week later Jim left for Calgary where he joined a group and became an active member until his demise from cancer.

I arrived back in Whitehorse permanently on March 24. The duties I had were demanding and a challenge, and I was most grateful to have the self-confidence and stability that my A.A. sobriety had restored to me.

I was there about five days when I contacted May Stickney, the non-A.A. member I had met at the Kingsway Group, and she introduced me to her father and mother, Boyd and Ann J. During the evening A.A. was introduced into the conversation and I made it known that I would attempt to start a group. Boyd drove me to my quarters and I knew that I had captured his interest.

Before we parted he said he would help me all he could, but he said he felt it may be too late in life for him to consider joining A.A. He was about 52. My reply to him was to the effect that he was alive and that it would be his decision whether he carried on as he was or changed to a sober way of life.

The next evening I returned to Boyd and Ann's home, this time with a few pamphlets, and a copy of the big book. It was an encouraging evening for me. Ann J. was a tremendous help and she said her home always would be available at any time for meetings.

The next day I visited the local newspaper and presented The Vancouver Sun newspaper to the editor with a request that he print the ad in the personal column that had brought me to A.A. The old gentleman read the ad and handed it back to me and stated that he did not think anyone in town wanted to stop drinking and if they did, he was sure they would.

I thanked him for his time and departed.

Somewhat discouraged, my thoughts ran to where now? As I left the newspaper office I noticed the Anglican Church in the distance, a spectacular log building, and I headed for the manse that adjoined it.

The rector, Cannon Chappel, greeted me at the door, and invited me to enter. I was in uniform, introduced myself by name and said I was a member of A.A. with an interest in establishing a group in town but had run into a roadblock with the newspaper.

A strange expression came over his face and he said quietly that this was the most incredible experience of his life.

Last night, he said, a very respectable citizen of Whitehorse had sat in the chair I was occupying, and wept in drunken despair. He was a chronic alcoholic, he said.

The rector had comforted him and said that the only possible hope for him was to contact A.A. And today, I knocked at his door.

He asked me when I could see this man. I replied that I would be available at any time and gave him my telephone number. Within an hour I received a call from Canon Chappel which led to my introduction to Marvin W. who at that time was principal of the high school at Whitehorse.

I arranged for him and his wife to accompany me to Boyd and Ann's that evening. This was the first A.A. meeting in Whitehorse, April 1, 1949. By coincidence, I started this narration today, April 1, 1979.

For the following two weeks I spent every evening either at Marvin's or Boyd's home, and I was very much aware of how very little I knew about the A.A. program. I had depended so much on the fellowship of the Kingsway Group, and my frequent contact with Granger.

I wrote to Granger frequently and he was a tremendous help to me. I would read his letters at our meetings. They were always so loaded with the down to earth wisdom that Granger imparted so skillfully.

Approximately three weeks after my first contact with Canon Chappel, I met him on the street. He informed me that he thought I should approach the local paper again and if I did, I would find them more receptive.

All of my personal mail arrived through the army, so I went to the post office and

rented a box, which turned out to be No. 365. I then returned to the newspaper office where the editor agreed to print the ad for \$1.75 per week.

Within 24 hours after the first notice appeared in the paper, I had lost my anonymity. But that was no concern to me. I accepted this as a challenge which still continues. If the worst that anyone can ever criticize me for would be that I was a member of A.A., I will be very satisfied with life.

It was not long before I received my first reply to the ad. I was flying out of town for a period of time and called at the post office *en route* to the airport. There was a letter, requesting information about A.A. I answered the letter on the plane and posted it at Edmonton.

It was from Jack P. and I referred him to Boyd J. and confirmed it with Boyd. I would meet him on my return. (See Jack P's story)

Things were happening fast. If these three stayed sober, it would create a very desirous example in a small town where everyone knew everyone's business. The moccasin trail as we called it carried news faster than TV.

Marvin became a new man, with hope in life and self-confidence restored. He announced at a meeting of the group in early June that he had resigned his job as school principal. He would sell everything, he said, pay off his debts, and move to Vancouver. When the time for his departure came, I wrote to Granger and referred Marvin to him.

Marvin and his family left at the end of the school term. He located in Abbotsford to become principal in due course of a high school. To my knowledge he never had a slip.

I recieved tremendous help and encouragement from many non-alcoholics. The senior medical officer in the army hospital, Major Howard Croskerry, would accompany me to a shack in skid road atmosphere to visit a sick drunk. He would provide medication when needed. His uncle in Ontario was a member of A.A., and he was forever grateful for the transformation in his uncle's life.

Herb Spanton, the commanding officer of the RCMP in Whitehorse, often requested me to visit some person under sentence and would release a prisoner into my custody so he could attend meetings.

Father Monnett, the Roman Catholic priest, was a wonderful, understanding human being, and a great help with his knowledge and Christian spirit. We had many serious discussions. I am not an R.C., but my respect for this man is great.

I was in Whitehorse 2½ years and during that time the group at one time grew to 13. Slips were frequent, but most people came back to resume a second or third approach to finding a new life. I met some wonderful people and had many experiences to remember.

One thing that always interested me, and that is, in the rough frontier environment that existed at that time I was never at any time subjected to snide remarks or any form of ridicule. Many of those living in Whitehorse were uncouth characters, fugitives from some experience in life; some just out of jail and escaping the social stigma, and a great many were running away from the bottle. It was amazing how often I found that those characters knew about A.A. and held great respect for it. Many did

not come to us, but there were occasions when they would advise others to come to see us. I have come to believe that these unfortunates who did not make good with the program, became our advertising agency in the fellowship.

I left Whitehorse on December 14, 1951, at which time I was promoted to lieutenant-colonel (another A.A. gratuity), and transferred to Winnipeg where I affiliated myself with the Winnipeg Group on Lilac Street.

I have lost contact with the Whitehorse Group with the exception of Jack P. Jack went to work on the United States pipeline and for many years was in charge of a pumping station near the Alaska Border. Jack was registered in the world directory as a loner. I corresponded with him and our paths crossed on a few occasions. For the past 10 years he has resided in Victoria. It was a highlight in my life three years ago to present Jack with his 25-year cake.