

Outside the Bottle

District 16 Newsletter

June, 2021



REFLECTIONS ON FOUNDER'S DAY

June 10th. Founders Day. A day celebrating the founding of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. Akron, Ohio where Dr. Bob Smith lived and practiced medicine is the location of a huge celebration. People from all over the world come to Akron to meet, share stories and celebrate their sobriety. Thousands of people attend the event. And by thousands, I mean thousands. I had the honor of chairing a panel one year, and although the panel was scheduled for 9:00 in the morning, and was dealing with an arcane subject, over 200 hundred people filled the room. It was an incredibly humbling experience for me. Perhaps the most memorable event occurs Saturday night when the attendees fill the Rubber Bowl or in later years InfoCision Stadium, where the University of Akron's' football team played and by fill, I mean to capacity and beyond, the entire audience recites the Serenity Prayer in unison and then a sobriety countdown is held. With thirty thousand alcoholics in attendance the energy in the stadium is palpable.

One of the highlights of the event is the pilgrimage to Dr. Bob's grave. People come, say a prayer and leave their sobriety tokens on the gravestone. Another is the huge cadre of motorcyclists who solemnly ride in dual file down market street to the cemetery. Akron, you see, is situated on several hills (Akron is Greek for hilltop), and the main drag, Market Street rises up a steep hill from the Cuyahoga River which runs through the town. If you stand at the foot of Market Street you can see this huge cavalcade of motorcycles stretching up the steep street to the University. Which they use a staging area. It is an enthralling site.

This celebration fills an entire weekend. Panels, Leads, an archive display. Some people think that the visit to Akron is incomplete without taking the tour of the important sites in AA history: Akron General Hospital where Sister Ignatia worked, the Mayflower hotel, the Stan Hewitt gatehouse, and of course, the house where Dr. Bob Smith lived and helped so many drunks recover from acute alcoholism.

I attended Founder's Day as part of a contingent from my home group the first year that the house was purchased by the Foundation and open to the public. The house was typical for a professional back in the day. It was a prairie style colonial with a broad front porch sitting on a rise above the street. You walked into a living room, at one corner of the room were the stairs going to the second floor and in the corner a small chair sitting in front of a built-in bookcase under the stairs. We were told that Dr. Bob sat there to relax and read. I sat in the chair and it was not all that comfortable, by the way. We then went into the dining room adjacent, and had coffee at the very table where Bob sat. Around the periphery of the room were portraits of all of the contributors to the Bg Book stories. It was very low key, informal and inspiring.

Unfortunately, such a low-key visit is impossible today. The thousands of people making the pilgrimage to the house has cause the caretakers to rope off the rooms and exhibits like a house in Greenfield Village. Busloads of people crowd the narrow brick street, and the whole are has become an open-air market with people hawking t shirts with cute slogans, shiny trinkets and other stuff, just waiting to take money from the naïve or unwary. Dr. Bob's garage was turned into a gift shop. That relaxed coffee I enjoyed at Dr. Bob's dining table in past years

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is now impossible. The best you can do is sit in the house next door (which was also acquired by the foundation) and drink your cup. It feels like some cheap road side tourist attraction.

The program of AA emerged out of the practices of the Oxford Group. One of these practices used by the group and later co-opted by AA is called "sharing." Literally telling your story warts and all to another. Bill Wilson, a Stockbroker from New York who had arrested his alcohol problem through the Oxford Group was in Akron, Ohio on business. He was newly sober and his felt his sobriety was precarious. Bill needed to find someone to help so that he could remain sober. Armed with a fistful of nickels he went to a pay telephone and began making calls to local clergy. After many fruitless telephone calls, he was put in touch with in touch with Henrietta Siberling, a prominent member of the Oxford Group. She knew a physician, also active in the Oxford group who was now a drunk. Dr. Bob was reluctant to meet with Bill, so reluctant that he "extracted from his wife a promise that they would not stay over fifteen minutes. The two men connected and their sharing session lasted over six hours. After this session and couple of shorter sessions, Bob stopped drinking abruptly. Of course, he did. Bill Wilson was staying at Bob's house and between him and Anne, Bobs' wife, the sobriety police were out in force. Bob was looked after like a child. But when Bob on his own and challenged, his newfound sobriety did not last.

As Bob mentions in his story in the Big Book, his "dry spell lasted for about three weeks." Then came a trip to Atlantic City to attend a convention, alone. Traveling by himself to the convention, Bob decided to meet his old traveling companion Mr. Scotch Bottle on the train to Atlantic City. Mr. Scotch Bottle was such a convivial companion that the two travelers missed the convention events and continued together for the next several days, with Bob going into a blackout and eventually waking up at a friend's house. This thoughtful friend got Bob home and poured him into bed.

Now here is Bob's dilemma. He is now home but he is scheduled to perform surgery the next day. He needed to be detoxed from his friend Mr. Scotch Bottle. It is related that Ann and Bill Wilson detoxed Bob using a mixture of "molasses, sauerkraut juice and honey." After detoxing, Bill Wilson and Anne drove Bob to the hospital. On the way Bill gave Bob a couple of Beers to settle his nerves and quiet the shaking in his hands. Bill Wilson recounts that at one point during the drive Bob turned to Bill and said that "he was ready to do this thing." The surgery, Bill asked. No Bob replied, "the other."

Bob telephoned Anne and reported that the surgery went well. But Bob did not return directly home. No one could find him. Ann and Bill suspected that Bob was immersed in a post-surgery celebration However, late that night he returned home exhausted, but sober. His decision to do "this thing" led him to action. He spent the day making the rounds of his creditors making amends and negotiating repayment of his debts. This was the Oxford Group tenet of restitution. Remember there was no AA at this time It had not been invented yet.

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The sharing or as we not know it the "12 step call" that Bill Wilson made, had no lasting effect on Bob. He stayed sober for three weeks but he still was on the fence. He listened to the suggestions but he had not decided to take action. Once Bob made the decision to commit to sobriety and take action, it was as if all the pieces fell into place.

In his final lead, which took place in Detroit Bob explains it this way: "...[I] couldn't understand what was wrong. I had done all the things that those good people told me to do. I had done them, I thought, very faithfully and sincerely. And I still continued to overindulge. But the one thing that they hadn't told me was the one thing that Bill did that Sunday – attempt to be helpful to somebody else..." Bob's decision to be helpful led to action. And because Bob's decision led to action, we are sitting here reading this article sober today.

Bob did not feel an immediate release from alcohol cravings. Those continued according Bob's own account for over the first two years of his sobriety. Even though he woke up every morning with the craving for drink raging within him he did not succumb. Instead, he became a prodigy of service; opening his house to drunks for meetings and to strangers from out of town for extended stays to help their healing; providing free medical care to those who needed but could not afford it; and sponsoring by some accounts over 5,000 people during his lifetime.

We all can't be Bob Smiths but we can honor his example this founders Day. Don't join the mad circus in Akron, buying t-shirts, cheap trinkets, or bumper stickers to slap on your car to broadcast to an uncaring world your membership in AA. Don't treat AA like it is your favorite sports team. Wearing a "protected by Smith and Wilson" t-shirt or putting an "easy does it" bumper sticker on your car will not keep your sober one bit or restore your sanity. But if you take the actions which will actually ensure recovery and growth people will take notice and respond.

Resolve to take the actions that you have been putting off: join a home group and get active, contact a home group member you have not seen in ages, invite the newcomer out for coffee or a meal, finish that 4th step you have been putting off, make the time to make amends and forgive others, volunteer to help those less fortunate, even those who are not alcoholics. The Covid-19 pandemic does not reduce the need for people to give of themselves. Rather, it increases that need. Area 33 does incredible work in carrying the real AA message through the work of their committees. Take the time to investigate the Bridging the Gap Program, or the Minuteman Program. The opportunities to help are more numerous than the excuses you can conger not to be involved. Dr. Bob realized that in order to help himself he had to help other people. In helping other people were are participating in our own healing. In so doing we are following the example set all of those years ago by Bob Smith.

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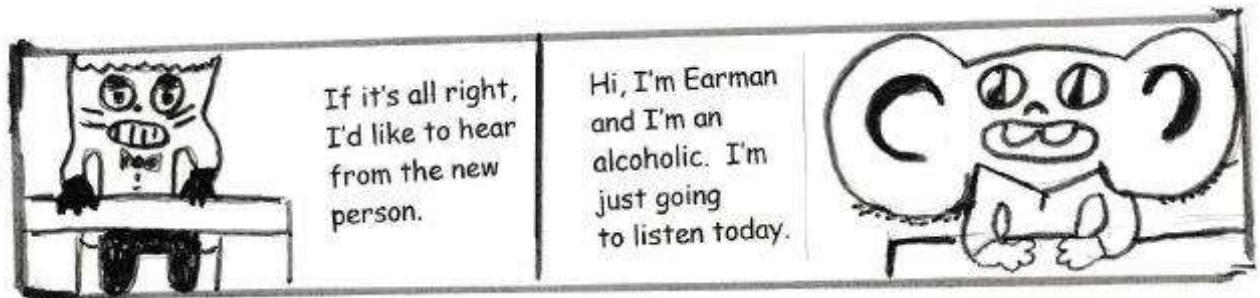
Am I being too serious? I do not think so Remember that the goal of the program of AA is to save ourselves from an awful and painful death from alcohol. Dr. Bob Smith realized that it required more than talk, more than casual agreement, it requires action. And, so it is with us. If we have the courage to act, we can heal the hurts we have suffered and more importantly acknowledge the hurts we have caused to others. If we have the courage to act, we begin to see where we have fallen short, where we have disappointed others and ourselves. Finally, if we have the courage to act, we meet a power greater than ourselves.

This Power was always ready to provide the help that we refused to take. When we finally reach out and accept the help that was always there for us, that Power will welcome us gratefully and say:” I watched you, wept for you, guided you and waited patiently for you to stop acting like a fool, I saw you choose to welcome me in your heart and decide to act like someone with integrity and compassion; someone trying to grow in my likeness; someone who I could be proud to know. Good job. Welcome, Keep moving forward.”

Celebrate? Yes of course as all alcoholics like a good party, but remember that the slime of resentment, fear and anger you lived in as a drinker which is still waiting for you if you stop taking action. Take time to celebrate but also take the time to reflect on the person you could be if you only took action--then take that action!

Use Founders Day as a time of renewal and a time to resolve to take action to change so by the next Founders Day you can reflect on those changes you have made in your life, the positive acts you have done to benefit others. Take a minute to reflect on and be grateful for the help you have received from others and especially the difficult and painful revelations you have had had about yourself, which spurred you to make changes that allowed you to heal your hurt and build positive change to your character.

Happy Founders Day to All!!



Announcements & Anniversaries

If your group is hosting an event, or if you or someone you know is celebrating an anniversary, please contact the newsletter and we will announce it on this page.

EVENTS

Area 33 meeting, June 13th Noon
This is a virtual event
New GSR Orientation 11:00 AM

District 16 Meeting, June 24th 7:00 PM
This is a virtual Event

Current information regarding in person and virtual meetings can be found on the area 33 website: [Alcoholics Anonymous \(aa-semi.org\)](http://Alcoholics Anonymous (aa-semi.org))

Outside the Bottle is the newsletter of District 16.

The newsletter contains announcements, meeting changes, events, news and information around the district, short articles on sobriety and recovery, and even some humor. All AA members are invited to submit material to the newsletter.

Please send correspondence or contributions to: clevebro@yahoo.com

Remember this is your newsletter help us make it better- all suggestions or comments are gladly welcome



A Sincere thank you to all newsletter contributors!

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