

Was This Group Meant To Be?

Very often, new groups in Alcoholics Anonymous are the result of a growing resentment by a segment of a group. They finally reach a point of dissatisfaction to the extent that they leave that group and start one which is more to their liking. That wasn't the case with the Founding Members of the Primary Purpose Group of Alcoholics Anonymous in Dallas, Texas. We had a well defined purpose; to focus on the content of our Basic Text and improve the effectiveness of our Fellowship. In looking at the series of events leading to the Founding of our Group, we can't help but wonder if our Group wasn't meant to be.

Excluding all the "coincidences" which preceded Bill's meeting with Dr. Bob and ultimately the publishing of our Basic Text, our story begins.

A resident of Little Rock, Arkansas found himself to be an alcoholic of the hopeless variety. His name was Joe and he tried everything he could to stop drinking for good and all. Every attempt failed. At the end of one of his drunks, he checked himself into the Insane Asylum in Benton, Arkansas to get another start. This was on March 10, 1962. He was smoking cigarettes at that period of his life and the only smoking material available to the inmates was tobacco in a bag and papers that came with it. They were called "roll your own" cigarettes as a smoker placed some tobacco in one of the thin sheets of paper, rolled it into the form of a cigarette, licked the loose side of the paper which then sealed the tobacco in and it was ready to be smoked. The "weed smokers" of today become very adept at that process. Of course, coming off a bad drunk, Joe's hands were pretty shaky so he had to give his tobacco and papers to one of the inmates who would roll it, lick it and hand it back to him to be smoked. As his mind cleared, the thought of putting that cigarette in his mouth became a little repulsive considering who had licked it.

One day, he was sitting and doing nothing when another alcoholic who had checked himself in for the same reason as Joe asked Joe if he would like to go to a meeting on drinking. The guys who did the meeting brought in a thermos of fresh coffee and a carton of Camel cigarettes which were given to those who attended the meeting. Joe started to reject the invitation suspecting that the men who were coming would talk about the evils of drinking. He had heard enough of that but he reconsidered as he thought about the slobbers of the nuts who licked his "roll you own" so he agreed to go just to get a cup of fresh coffee and a package of "ready roll" cigarettes. He was very surprised to learn the men were not there to talk on the evils of drinking. Rather they were there to tell their story of being victims of alcoholism and of the Solution they had found in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Joe had never heard of Alcoholics Anonymous and was very impressed with Charles' story. After the meeting was over Joe went up to Charles and said, "Man, I sure like what you said, but what do you think I ought to do?" Charles looked at Joe and said, "Fella, I just told you what I do. I don't give a damn what you do. That is your business but if you want this thing, I'll help you." So Joe was on his way. He had the willingness

to do what was necessary to survive alcoholism. But it wasn't going to be easy for Joe as he wasn't very welcome at AA meetings in Little Rock. Remember, this was in 1962 in Little Rock, Arkansas, a community very resistant to social integration. The members of the AA group in Joe's neck of the woods let him attend meetings with the instructions that he was not to arrive early, stay late or drink their coffee. You see, Joe is an African American and as he said "Little Rock was no place for a Black Man to be looking for help in 1962." But Joe wanted what he had seen in Charles and was willing to pay the price.

Being somewhat isolated from the Fellowship, he took an interest in the Big Book as his primary source of recovery information. He had no luck in finding anyone who was willing to study it with him so it was a solitary effort. His wife Loubelle was active in Al-Anon and they were to attend an Al-Anon Conference where Joe had been asked to introduce a member of Alcoholics Anonymous named Charlie P. who was to be the AA speaker. Joe was looking forward to meeting Charlie as he believed he was going to get to meet Charlie Pride. This Charlie P. turned out to be a disappointment. Charlie lived in the Northwest corner of Arkansas in a small community named Maysville and as Joe said, "The sucker wasn't even the right color."

Since Joe was to introduce a man he had never met, he spent some time with Charlie to get acquainted. As they visited, they learned each had a deep interest in the Big Book and Charlie was in the same position as was Joe; he couldn't find anyone who would study it with him. They were immediately attracted to each other and a bond was made. They took advantage of every opportunity they could to update what they had learned since they were last together. One of Charlie's protégés learned of the joint study Joe and Charlie had going and asked if he could sit in on one of their sessions. Of course, he was welcomed. The word began to get around and more and more members of the Fellowship wanted to listen to these two guys share their experience and knowledge of the Basic Text for Alcoholics Anonymous. It wasn't long before Joe McQ. & Charlie P. became well known for their unique way of telling the story the Big Book has for those who have an interest in the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. They began to be invited to bring their "The Big Book Comes Alive" Program to more and more places and their influence was phenomenal.

The first I heard of Joe was an audio tape of him telling his story. The more I listened to it, the more I realized I had been missing a lot of what Alcoholics Anonymous has to offer. Unfortunately, there was little to no interest in the Big Book in the AA Groups I was attending. I kept on going to meetings and doing my 12 Step work even though I now know I didn't have the qualifications to sponsor anyone.

At that time, my wife and I spent a lot of our spare time on the White River near Mountain View, Arkansas. The thought passed through my mind that I might try to see if I could find this guy, Joe, as we passed through Little Rock sometime on our way to the River. What chance would I have in finding a guy named Joe in Little Rock? I had no idea that I could have stopped at almost any place of business in that City, asked if they knew a "Joe McQ." and get an answer, "You bet. You can find him at the Serenity

House, 2500 S. Broadway.” But then my Daughter, Carol, had gotten herself hooked up with a guy who originally came from Arkansas.

In the 1970’s, the Porche had arrived in Texas. Those little two-seater cars became popular with the younger people. Carol bought one and was more than a little proud to be in the Porche clan. One of their routines when they saw each other on the road, was to honk their horn, “beep, beep” and wave. Carol just happened to see a Porche owner with a flat tire. She stopped to help and it wasn’t long before they were going together and then married. Not long after, Jim was offered a job in Little Rock so they went. We planned to spend Christmas with them so shortly after we arrived; I found where there were AA meetings and got myself off to one of them. It happened to be at the Wolfe Street Foundation; an old funeral home which was leased by some members of Alcoholics Anonymous and was being renovated and made into a choice facility where new groups could get their beginning and where large meetings could be held. Joe happened to be at that meeting and after it was over, I introduced myself to him and told him of the tape I had listened to. I asked is there was any possibility of having some of his time while we were in LR? He said he was free then and invited me to come to the Serenity House where we could talk. Very shortly after we began visiting Joe, in his loving manner, informed me that I apparently didn’t know anything about alcoholism and certainly didn’t know anything about the Program of Alcoholics Anonymous. While he hurt my feelings, I was willing to listen to him. He took me into the library, took down a copy of the Big Book and started teaching me some things I had never known. From him, I learned what alcoholism was and knew in my heart of hearts that I was the real thing. I also began developing a deep interest in our Basic Text and was made to realize how utterly simple our Program of Recovery really is. I left him with a new attitude about the reality of what Alcoholics Anonymous is about. I learned that our Program had a much greater purpose than just not drinking and going to meetings.

Shortly after we returned home, I learned he and Charlie were coming to Dallas in the Spring of 1984 for their “Big Book Comes Alive” weekend Program. I attended the whole session and was blown away with what I learned. It was then that I started a Big Book study in my home with the folks I sponsored.

I was reasonably active in the Fellowship and attended conferences and Roundups with some regularity. One that proved to be a God send was the “Man to Man Conference” held annually at Brownwood, Texas. While I made many new friends there, one was with a man from Tulsa, Oklahoma named Gene L. Gene and I became very close and he invited me to come to Tulsa in the forthcoming November to attend a Big Book Seminar which included Joe and Charlie but also a lady from Spring, Texas whose name is Willie and a man from Florida named John. (These were members of the “Paul Revere Group— they just carried the message). Gene told me the Seminar was a four day event and had been successful in other parts of the country but this would be the first in the Southwest. The thought of going all the way to Tulsa to hear about the Big Book after sitting in the “Big Book Comes Alive” weekend seemed unnecessary, so I discounted the idea. And besides, I had started having that weekly Big Book study session in my home.

Not long after the Brownwood Conference, we again visited our Daughter in LR and again I spent some time with Joe. While sitting and talking with him, I realized how much he had helped me and simply said, "Joe, like it or not, you have become my Sponsor." I felt certain he would tell me there was no way he had time to fool with a fool like me but he simply smiled and said, "Thank you." He has been my Mentor since.

Shortly after that, Joe and Charlie came to the Shalom Group in Denton to do the "Big Book Comes Alive." I drove up Sunday morning for the last few hours of their program and after it was over, I asked Joe about this Seminar to be held in Tulsa. Joe said it would be a good learning experience and would like to see me there. So I went.

Joe understated the value of that Seminar. It was a complete overview of our Program. Those four members of the "Paul Revere Group" (they just carried the message) covered the Basic Text, "Alcoholics Anonymous", The "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions" and then separate studies of our Twelve Traditions and Twelve concepts. It was a brilliant and powerful presentation of the Program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I told Gene how thankful I was that he had mentioned the Seminar to me as I would have missed the whole thing. I made the comment that it was tragic that there was so little of what our Program really demands of us in our meetings. I told him of the Big Book meetings Joe's Group, the "Dunbar Group" I had attended in Little Rock but had never heard of another AA Group doing what they did. Gene said that there were some AA Groups in Tulsa that did nothing but study the Big Book. The Group he helped Found, the "Sobriety Live" Group was one of them. He also introduced me to Joe McC., a protégé of Charlie P. who founded the "Original West Side" Group in Tulsa. I was intrigued and told Gene I would love to visit their Groups and see how they did it. His job required that he travel but he suggested I give him a call after the Holidays and see when he would be home so I could spend some time with him.

I called him right after New Years, 1988 and learned he would be home for the next several days so come on up. I cut out the time but then there was a terrific ice storm hit Northeastern Oklahoma. I called Gene to reschedule but he said if I was careful, I could make it with no trouble so I headed off to Tulsa.

We attended the "Original West Side Group" meeting that night and it blew me away. With the streets of Tulsa covered with ice, there were about 150 folks show up with Big Book in hand and for one and one-half hours, there was an in-depth study of the Big Book. The next day at noon, we attended the "Sobriety Live Group" and again, the vast majority of those attending came with their Big Book. There well over 100 of them.

Gene had some sales calls to make so I went back to his home to wait for him. While sitting in his dining area, I looked at the winter scene in his back yard and had a visit with God. I simply asked Him to use me to bring the message of the Big Book back into our meetings if it was His will.

I returned to Dallas the next day and immediately started trying to see where we could hold a meeting. I had carried a resentment toward the Church we belonged to for running the Minister off who was instrumental in seeing that a Member of Alcoholics Anonymous 12 Stepped me when I was near death from drinking in 1964. About a month before my trip to Tulsa, I had realized that resentment was still haunting me so I made an appointment with the minister I had never met and made my amends to the Church through him. He was impressed with my sincerity and I had the feeling I had made a friend in him so I called him and asked him if I could stop by and visit for a few minutes. He said he would like to see me. I told him of what I wanted to do and wondered if the members of the Church would be willing to let us hold our meetings there. He replied that the Church had decided they wanted to expand their "Outreach Activities" and he had intended to call me and see if we might be interested in starting an AA group there. Was this one of those "coincidences?"

I then prepared a letter to be mailed to some of the more serious minded members of the Groups I had attended informing them of what I hoped we could do with a new Group and invited them to be a part of the Founder's meeting to help set the Group on it's journey.

The Founder's Meeting was held on the evening of January 26, 1988. It went very smoothly and most of the important decisions were made. We wanted to place the focus of our meetings on our Basic Text so rather than use the Grapevine Preamble as our "Opening," which places the emphasis on the Fellowship, we elected to "Open" with the first paragraph to the "Foreword to the First Edition." We also decided to "Close" our meetings with the last few paragraphs of page 164. That would bracket what was to happen during the meeting. Only a couple of "old timers" expressed their concern by saying that if all we were going to do was study the Big Book, we didn't have a prayer of being successful. I wish I could dig those old suckers up and let them see what happens at our meetings and what the members of our Group do between meetings. Those who make up our Group are very active in taking the message of the Big Book into those places where suffering alcoholics wind up seeking shelter and help. We try to get to them before they become "discussionized."

Our Big Book Study Meetings went pretty well. On occasion, we would have folks from other groups, which were heavy in Discussion Meetings, who would want to share their ES&H with our Group. I'd write a little note to let them know our meetings were to learn what the First One Hundred did that worked so well for them. We were not interested in using meeting time for individuals to share their thoughts or experiences. I would hand them the note and most of the time, they would then join us in our study.

Someone suggested that a Big Book Study Guide would help solve the problem of drifting away from the material in the Big Book. I had witnessed how well a Study Guide worked for the Big Book Study meetings of the Dunbar Group in Little Rock so we decided to see if we could produce one which covered all the material we were accustomed to studying. Doing the writing would be no problem but how to put it in book form was a question we had no quick answer to.

By this time, an alcoholic named Myers became a member of our Group as the result of his twin Brother searching for one in Dallas that would give him a better opportunity to survive alcoholism than where he had been going. Chris visited our Group and liked what he saw. Shortly after, Myers joined us. It so happened that Myers was in the book binding business. He provided the answer to the question of how to produce the book. With the Study Guide, there have been only a very few occasions where a note to a member has been warranted. Our meetings are now very effective in learning the message our Founders wanted to pass on to us. Following that, we designed a web site to represent the manner in which we conduct our meetings and our Twelve Step activity.

So what we have in Dallas is a group of alcoholics who try to emulate the man who was our inspiration. A spark that was thrown off that spiritual bonfire, Joe McQ., landed in Dallas, Texas and ignited another spiritual bonfire which throws of many sparks and has ignited and is igniting other spiritual bonfires around the world. It seems to me this Group of Big Book oriented alcoholics was destined to be exactly what it has become, a Group with a deep concern for the welfare of the newcomer; the Primary Purpose of any AA Group. From those who visit our meetings, members of the Fellowship hearing our members share their experience and knowledge of the Big Book, from those who visit our web site or see some of the articles written by members of our Group, are the beginnings of another AA Group committed to returning our Program to our meeting rooms. We can never have too many of them

Because a real alcoholic was willing to be lectured to in exchange for a cup of fresh coffee and a pack of cigarettes, a young lady who bought a Porche, a trip to Brownwood, Texas and a sick sucker who was willing to make an amend for a long standing resentment, we have one of the most effective Groups of Alcoholics Anonymous in this part of the AA world. I do believe God pulled the strings to make this one a reality. What do you think?

Cliff B.

Email - cbbb164@aol.com

www.ppgaadallas.org