

We Carried This Message

A history of AA in the Harrisburg area



Third Edition

Published by the Harrisburg Area Intergroup

Remembering our friends



On Memorial Day, 1999, members of the AA community planted this blue spruce outside the Fellowship House in memory of all those who have died in sobriety--- those who carried the message throughout the Harrisburg area for more than half a century.

Cover art by Bradley R., 19th Street Group

We Carried This Message

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Preface

This is the third edition of *A History of AA in the Harrisburg Area*, encompassing the period from early 1940 through January 1, 2000.

We have endeavored to capture the essence of growth in our community of Alcoholics Anonymous and to trace the evolution of our groups as they have grown and flourished and, in some cases, as they naturally have fallen from existence with the passage of time.

We have included information on the history of AA in general in the belief that our local development is part of a larger picture that ties all of us together locally and nationally, today with yesterday and the future.

It is our further belief that a conscious contact with all that has gone before can serve only to bolster our resolve to make AA even stronger as we face the exciting challenge of a new millennium.

We express our appreciation to the oldtimers, Harrisburg Area Intergroup, Alanon Association, Inc. and the groups and individual members who have helped so graciously to fill the gaps in our attempt to update and make more accurate the information at hand.

Foreword—why a history?

Most of us brought our lifelong companions—terror, bewilderment, frustration, and despair—to our first AA meeting.

Our grand entrance was a halting, stumbling shuffle to the first available seat in the back row where we spent the next hour looking very much like frozen-eyed deer caught in the headlights of an onrushing car.

At that early stage of our recovery, we gave little thought to our good fortune at having been chosen to be there.

And we certainly gave no thought to—had no thought of—those who had gone before, those who had struggled to keep alive this “benign conspiracy” of which Bill W. spoke.

For us, the world we knew was the world we dragged through the door that first day.

But as we took our first steps toward what was often a mystifying recovery, we began to gain the gift of gratitude—a realization that we owe our very lives to countless thousands of men and women who held firm this strange concept of helping themselves by helping others.

And we joined them in the journey on that “road of happy destiny.”

At first we thought it a colossal achievement simply to clean a few ash trays and return them to their appointed places.

Then we made coffee, cleaned restrooms, and arranged meeting materials.

We chaired meetings, told our stories, answered phones, even started new meetings while helping old ones to grow.

We got into Twelfth Step work—visiting prisons and detox centers, manning hotline telephones, and reaching out to friends, neighbors, and strangers who cried for help.

In short, we did anything we were asked to do or that our Higher Power led us to do in the name of service.

We knew that was the path that was carved by our founders.

And by following them, we became one with them.

So it is that with this third edition of *The History of AA in the Harrisburg Area* we can once again be with all of those who came before us.

We can gratefully remind ourselves of the sometimes heroic efforts put forth to keep this precious program of Alcoholics Anonymous alive and well for all of us.

And we can use these stories of the past to remind ourselves that “*I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that I am responsible.*”

—Bill C.

How it works

We have attempted to arrange local-interest items chronologically in this edition of *A History of AA in the Harrisburg Area*.

However, those stories relating to Intergroup, which was organized in 1980, all follow immediately after “History of Harrisburg Area Intergroup” on Page 25, regardless of the starting date of the function they describe.

We have also included some AA history of national significance leading up to the beginning of our fellowship in Harrisburg.

References to that earlier period have been placed at random throughout the booklet, as have a number of miscellaneous short items.

Finally, we received no new information from some groups, in which case we simply updated the meeting schedule where necessary and retained information that appeared in the second edition.

We trust that you will find what you need and that you will use what you find to strengthen your own resolve to continue to carry the message of AA wherever you may find yourself in the exciting future that lies in store for all of us.

“A Benign Conspiracy”

The history of Alcoholics Anonymous is a simple one—seven decades of one drunk helping another to a new level of spiritual, sober living.

But how it started, how it flourished, and how it reached its healing hand into the Harrisburg area and other cities throughout the world is a story of remarkable coincidences.

Some would call those coincidences “the hand of God.”

Bill W. (below), one of our co-founders, called the whole thing a “benign conspiracy.”

How else can anyone explain how four teenagers came together in Manchester Vermont in the early 1900s—as if chosen as a cast of characters in what would become a miraculous drama?

Eventually, three of them—Rowland H., Ebby T., and Bill W.—would fall into the clutches of alcohol. The fourth, Lois Burnham, would one day marry Bill.

Rowland, who by all accounts had become a hopeless alcoholic, was told by the psychiatrist Carl Jung in Switzerland that only a “religious experience” could save him from insanity and death.

Rowland then returned to Vermont and fell in with an Oxford group, people who



practiced first-century Christianity.

And thereby starts our history—and our way of life.

Rowland got sober and helped Ebby.

Ebby got sober and helped Bill.

Bill got sober—after a miraculous spiritual experience in his hospital room—and several months later found himself in Akron, Ohio, at the end of a failed business trip and wanting very much to take a drink.

It was there in Akron that another Oxford group had been praying daily for God to send someone to help Dr. Bob S., one of their own who had reached the end of his alcoholic rope.

Bill knew the only way he was going to stay sober was by helping another alcoholic, so he got in touch with a clergyman who steered him to Henrietta Seiberling, one of the members of the Akron Oxford Group that had been praying for help for Dr. Bob. (See page 35)

And Bill W. helped Dr. Bob get sober.

And so it went, with small AA groups eventually forming in Akron and other cities—mostly in the Midwest.



Just a few years later, in June of 1941, the first AA meeting was held in Harrisburg because one recovering alcoholic knew he had to help another if he himself were to stay sober, just as Bill W. had in Akron.

And from that modest effort, AA has grown in the Harrisburg area to include some 50 groups; outreach to prisons, hospitals, and mental health facilities; and a wide array of spiritual and social activities.

Dr. Bob (left), in his last talk, said AA “is about service and love.”

And even a cursory review of our history reveals a bedrock of service and love at every turn of the road.

If we are to continue our growth, we must remember that legacy.

And that is the purpose of this little book.

It is to remind all of us how and why we became so blessed.

It is to keep us forever aware of and grateful to those who were ready and willing to carry the AA message to us.

And it is to help us remain forever responsible for carrying the message ourselves whenever an alcoholic reaches out for help.

A benign conspiracy indeed!

The Earliest History of Alcoholics Anonymous in the Harrisburg Area

Early 1940: in the summer of 1940, Roger B., a native of Philadelphia, who traveled often to Harrisburg, tried to carry the AA message as a means of seeking assistance for his own alcoholism. He met with little or no success here.

Early 1941: John L. arrived in Harrisburg from New York for the purpose of establishing a program for alcoholics. This was the first contact recorded by the General Services Office (GSO) of such action in Harrisburg.

March 3, 1941: Roger B. was transferred by his company to Harrisburg and became a resident here. He wrote to GSO and requested information and support in starting an AA group in Harrisburg. GSO promptly responded since this was the first inquiry from Harrisburg since the now-famous Saturday Evening Post article by Jack Alexander was published and drew 1,100 responses from other towns and cities across the country.

June 18, 1941: Roger B. became the initiator of AA in Harrisburg. Along with the help of five other recovering alcoholics, he started a meeting in his sister's home on Lewis Street in north Harrisburg. Through Roger's influence, John L. volunteered to speak to area hospitals concerning the disease of alcoholism.

July 20, 1941: Roger B., in a letter to GSO, stated that he had had a slip. In spite of this, Roger emphasized that "trying to help other alcoholics has helped me beyond words." By this time, doctors at

In 1937, when the "conservatives and promoters," as Bill W. called them, were arguing about publishing a book to help other alcoholics, there were approximately 40 alcoholics known to be recovering with the help of principles laid down by Bill W. and Dr. Bob. Today? Millions!

See *Language of the Heart*, pp. 9-12

Harrisburg Hospital had begun to call Roger B. to assist suffering alcoholics through Twelfth Step work.

August 16, 1941: The original meeting, having grown to nine members, shifted from Roger's sister's house to 4th and Market St. in downtown Harrisburg.

August 20, 1941: It was announced that a regular Thursday 8:30 p.m. meeting would be established and held in the Blue Room of the Hotel New Governor Cafe dining room. Secretaries for this new group included Tony S. and Ralph W.

March 12, 1942: Ralph W. reported to GSO that the Thursday meeting was still growing strong with ten members in attendance. "For the past two weeks the group had been meeting in my apartment where we have more privacy than we previously had in the hotel restaurant," Ralph told GSO

1942-1947: The group remained active. Membership increased from ten to 25. There is no record of where the group met during this time.

August, 1947: The group relocated to 2nd and Chestnut Sts. in Harrisburg. It was known as the Harrisburg Group and was now 50 members strong! This was the only group between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Members from outside the area traveled 50 miles or more each way to attend a meeting. Whatever it takes! Records also show that another group, (name unknown) had begun at 1822 Green Street.

August, 1950: The Harrisburg Group, having now grown to 100 members, commemorated its "Tenth Anniversary" by holding an open public meeting at the State Forum. For this anniversary, the group invited the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the Department of Properties and Supplies, GSO, and the *Harrisburg Evening News*. The Harrisburg Group was proud to stake its claim as being one of 3,000 groups now meeting in the United States. Total national membership in AA at this time was estimated at 90,000.

District #36---a guardian of traditions

It sounds confusing—somewhat like a well-seasoned alphabet soup—but AA's service structure is the key to our being able to carry the message both locally and worldwide and to do it within the guidelines of AA's 12 traditions.

So how does it work?

The AA groups in Dauphin, Cumberland, and Perry counties—plus Dillsburg in York County—make up District #36.

District #36 is one of 47 districts in AA's General Service Area (GSA) #59, which is the Eastern Pennsylvania General Service Assembly (EPGSA) Area.

And each of those General Service Areas has an Area Committee composed of a member from each district (the District Committee Member or DCM) and a panel of officers and a delegate to the United States/Canada General Service Conference in New York City.

The current District Committee Member DCM from District #36 is Brad R.; the alternate is Jane L. The voting members of District #36 are the General Service Representatives (GSRs) of each group in the district.

One of the principal functions of this General Service Structure is to serve as a conduit through which AA questions and answers can pass from groups, via their GSRs, through the DCM, to the Area and from the Area to the Conference and the AA Trustees, who are the guardians of the traditions.

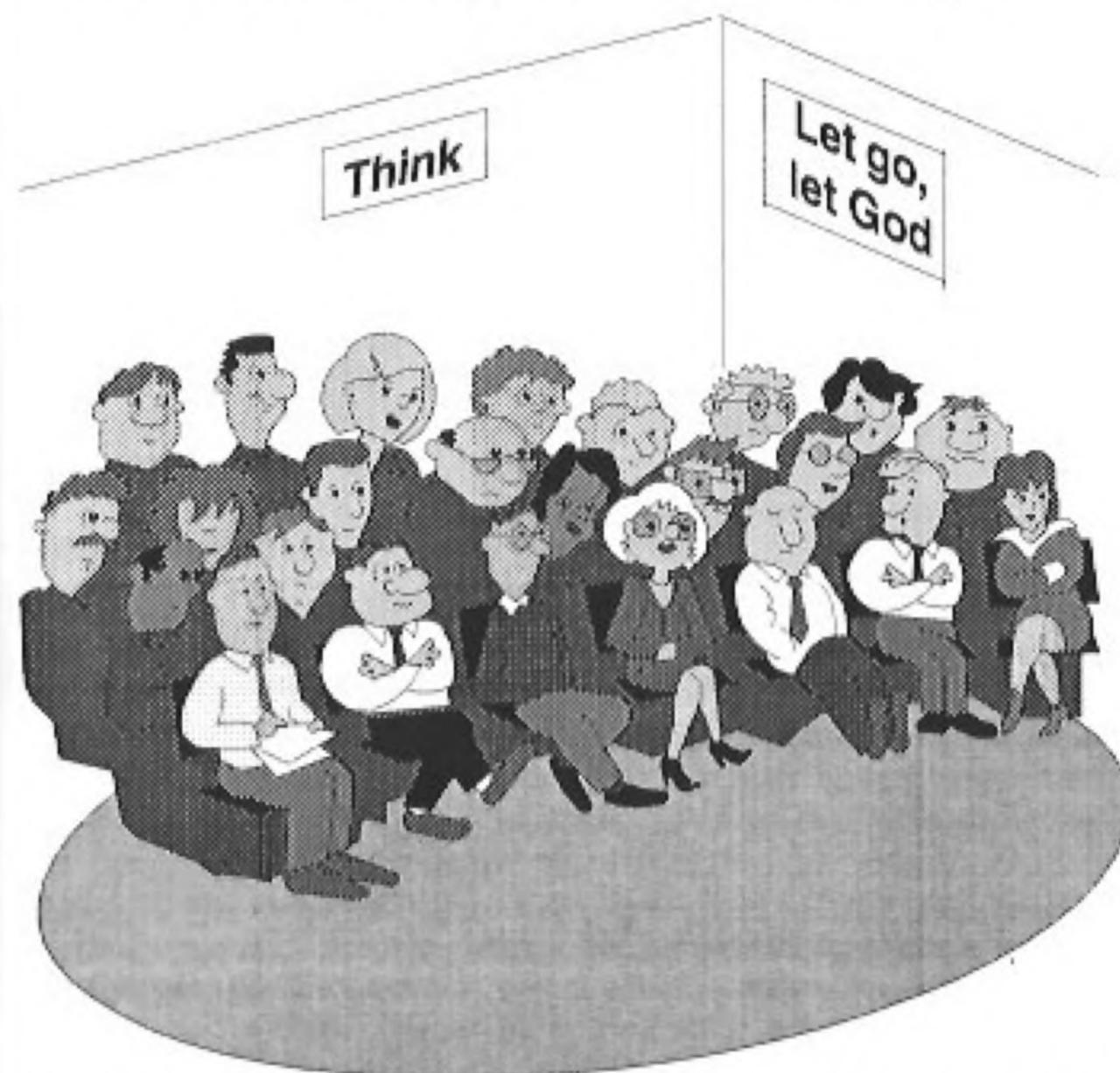
The DCM, with the assistance of the alternate DCM, serves as a liaison to the individual groups and intergroup in an attempt to resolve any problems relative to the traditions of AA.

District #36 history and AA's Harrisburg Area history dovetail each other perfectly, for the first group in District #36 was the Second and Chestnut Street Group (see page 8), which was the first registered group in Harrisburg in 1941 and the group that gave birth to what is now Mid City Group.

Fellowship House

The story of the Fellowship House—how it came to be, its struggles, its triumphs—parallels the history of Harrisburg Area AA itself. That story would appear at this point in our time-line. However, because of its length, we placed it in the back of the book. **See page 61.**

Our Harrisburg Area AA Groups



On the following pages, in chronological order, are the histories of all the AA groups in our area. Active groups carry a **16-point headline**. Where information was available, we have also briefly recalled in single paragraphs those groups that are no longer active. In those cases, the group names have been set in **11-point, boldface type** within the copy.

Mid City Group

Mid City Group is the oldest active group in the Harrisburg area and, in fact, traces its roots to the very earliest days of AA.

Here's how Mid City came to be.

The decision to construct a building at 1251 S. 19th St. caused dissension among members of the **Second Street Group**.

When the group moved its meetings to the Alanon Association of Harrisburg Clubhouse in 1951, members who had opposed the construction continued to meet at their home site at 201 Chestnut St. When they became unable to pay the rent, the group split into the following groups:

Hill Group: meetings were started by Herb S. with seven members at Evangelical Lutheran Church, 17th & State Sts., Harrisburg. The group remained active until 1965.

Mid City Group: The group registered with GSO in 1953, with John S. as secretary and a membership of 12.

The Mid City Group met at many inner city locations before renting the basement office at 112B N. Second St., Harrisburg, in 1960. That location was readily accessible to drifters and panhandlers. After listening to the stories of these people, members asked those who were hungry and without shelter if they would go to Bethesda Mission. If the answer was "yes," members would "pass the hat." It is an unwritten rule, of course, never to give money to a drunk, but after the AA meeting, members would see that the needy persons got food and a bed for the night.

The group continued to meet at 112B N. Second St. for 12 years—until the Agnes flood of 1972 forced them to relocate to 122 Chestnut St., Harrisburg.

The influence of old timers Mert S. and John B. kept the group on track, and during 1982-83, Mid City became known locally as the "no bullshit group."

After accommodating the AA meeting for 17 years, the building at 122 Chestnut St. was sold and the group moved to Pine Street Presbyterian Church at 3rd & Pine Sts.

Sometime in 1990 the group moved to the second floor above the Chinese restaurant at 3rd and South Sts. After meetings at this location, members were sure to have the rich aroma of chicken fried rice emanating from their clothing.

Between 1991 and the present, the group met at the Penbrook United Church of Christ in Penbrook, an unheated boxing gym with a leaky roof on North 7th St., a building on South 10th St., and eventually settled at St. Paul's United Methodist Church at River & Vine Sts. Membership is approximately 15, and the location is good for drawing new members from the inner city.

The Mid City Group has remained active since its initial meeting in 1953—a period of almost half a century!

Currently, it holds *closed discussion* meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. and *open discussion* meetings Saturday at 7:30 p.m. All meetings are *non-smoking*.

And then there were twelve

Long before the Twelve Steps of AA were put to paper, Rowland H. taught Ebby T. the precepts he had learned from the Oxford movement. Ebby, in turn, taught them to Bill W.. Here they are as taken directly from Bill's handwritten notes.

- 1) **We admitted we were licked.**
- 2) **We got honest with ourselves.**
- 3) **We talked it over with another person.**
- 4) **We made amends to those we had harmed.**
- 5) **We tried to carry this message to others with no thought of reward.**
- 6) **We prayed to whatever God we thought there was.**

It was these same six steps that Bill W. passed on to Dr. Bob in Akron. At first Dr. Bob refused to do Step 4, giving rise to the later—and now famous—"at some of these we balked. We thought we could find an easier, softer way, but we could not."

1957

Hershey Group

The Hershey Group is the second oldest active group in the Harrisburg area.

It also might be among the most innovative.

It started December 12, 1957, when a group of 12 recovering people met at Wally's House in the Village of Ebenezer in Lebanon County.

Early in January, 1958, the group moved to All Saints Episcopal Church in Hershey at 8 p.m. Wednesdays for a *closed discussion* meeting.

As the membership soared to approximately 75, a larger meeting place was found in the Hershey Medical Center in 1971, and meetings were added on Fridays (8 p.m. *closed steps & traditions*) and Saturdays (8 p.m. *open discussion*; last Saturday of each month, *anniversary*). All meetings in Hershey are *non-smoking*.

An expansion project at the Medical Center in the 1980s forced the group to find meeting space on short notice, and since January, 1984, it has met at the Derry Presbyterian Church at Derry & Mansion Rd. in Hershey

In addition to its meeting schedule, the Hershey Group maintains an active social agenda, including summer family-oriented picnics and a holiday covered dish dinner/speaker meeting.

For the past several years, Hershey has participated with the Paoli (PA) Group in an exchange speakers program that brings Paoli to Hershey and vice-versa, at least once per year.

Membership in 1999 was estimated at 60.

1958

19th Street Group

Upon completion of the Alanon Club facility at 1251 S. 19th St., the majority of the original Harrisburg Group members (the 2nd & Chestnut Street Group) began to attend meetings at the new facility.

The "club" could not be registered as a group with GSO because of the 6th Tradition prohibition against ownership of prop-

erty by AA. Because people attending meetings at the clubhouse wanted to belong to a registered group, the 19th Street Group was formally organized and registered in 1958.

The group held open meetings on Wednesdays and Fridays—the largest meetings in the Harrisburg area through 1979.

Meeting nights were expanded to include Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays, and membership grew until 1979.

Then, as many new groups formed in the area, attendance and contributions decreased. When financial responsibilities became impossible to meet, the group considered moving its meetings to another location.

Then a different, and better, solution was found—one which is still in operation today. **(Please see Fellowship House, page 61)**

In 1979, the 19th Street Group gained permission to hold its first Christmas Alcothon in the facility.

The 19th Street Activity Committee sponsors many social functions and meetings for the recovering community, including the New Year's Eve Dance, the spring and fall dinner-dances, Thanksgiving Day Alcothon and Dinner-Dance, a Christmas Alcothon, a dance the third Saturday of every month, and a Sunday afternoon *speaker* meeting the third Sunday of May.

And while the world was going mad in anticipation of Y2K, members of the 19th Street Group cooperated with Intergroup to sponsor the first New Years Day Alcothon.

The full meeting schedule for 19th Street Group is as follows: Sundays at 8 p.m., *closed Big Book*; Mondays at 8:30 p.m., *open beginners*; Tuesdays at 8:30 p.m., *open Living Sober*; Wednesdays at 8:30 p.m., *closed discussion*; Thursdays at 8:30 p.m., *closed "12 & 12"*; Fridays at 8:30 p.m., *open speaker*, except on the last Friday of each month, which is *Anniversary Night*; and Saturdays at 7 p.m., *open "As Bill Sees It"*;

Meetings are attended by 20 to 50 members, with a total membership count of 419 members in November, 1999.

* * *

Editor's note: the 19th Street Group's history is so closely intertwined with that of the Fellowship House that it is difficult to separate the two and not be guilty of a great deal of repetition. We have, therefore, included much of 19th Street Group's earliest activities in the story of the Fellowship House.

1962

Central Pennsylvania Intergroup Service Committee, precursor to Harrisburg Area Intergroup, was established by Joseph C.

1963

Carlisle Area Group

Eugene R. founded this first Carlisle group in 1963 mainly because the closest AA meeting at that time was at the 19th Street Clubhouse.

A small group met weekly in Gene's home but then disbanded.

The group was re-formed in 1967 with *open discussion* meetings held on Tuesdays and *closed discussion* meetings on Saturdays. All meetings were at Carlisle's Church of the Brethren on the corner of Walnut and South West Sts. At 8:30 p.m.

Approximately 20 members attended the Tuesday meetings. Originally the Saturday meetings were sparsely attended and discontinuation of the meetings was considered. During the late 70s, however—partly due to the influx of younger members—Saturday attendance soon equaled that of the Tuesday meetings.

Before the formation of other Carlisle groups, members also car-pooled to meetings in Harrisburg, Camp Hill, Mechanicsburg, and Dillsburg.

For various reasons starting in 1981, the Carlisle Area Group's meeting place was changed several times to other Carlisle locations, all within walking distance of the town's center, until settling into its present location at Grace United Methodist Church, South West & Pomfert Sts., Carlisle.

Although new Carlisle groups were formed during the mid- and late 80s, attendance at the original group's meetings continues to grow.

The schedule now is Tuesdays at 8 p.m., *closed discussion*; 1st & 3rd Saturdays at 8 p.m., *open discussion*; 2nd Saturday at 8 p.m. *open speaker*; and 4th Saturday at 8 p.m., *anniversary* meeting.

Other than for a short period, this group has also maintained responsibility for Carlisle AA's 24-hour answering service and its Carlisle Post Office Box.

1966

West Shore Group

From 1953 through 1965 attempts had been made to establish groups on the West Shore.

On September 11, 1961, about 20 members of the Mid City Group and the 19th Street Group, basically residents of the West Shore, met at Dick and Lucy E.'s home to discuss the feasibility of starting a West Shore Group. The concensus was "Let's try it!"

The next several meetings (*Thursdays closed, Sundays open*) were held at Dick and Lucy's home. Eddy S. then offered the group the use of the building at the New Cumberland Wire Rope Co.

The company had discontinued business in 1959 and its building, adjacent to the railroad, had become a haven for drifters. The office had to be cleared of its empty whiskey and wine bottles, beer cans, and related trash before each meeting could begin.

Between 1967 and 1971, several churches were contacted, without success, to provide a new meeting place. Finally in 1971, Polly C. contacted Trinity Lutheran Church of Camp Hill, and the group received permission to hold its meetings on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays.

When the 21st Street Group started its Sunday *open speaker* meeting, Sunday attendance at the West Shore Group's meetings dwindled and it was discontinued. A Wednesday evening *beginners* meeting was initiated at that time.

Meetings, all at 8 p.m., are now held on Mondays, *closed discussion*; Tuesdays, *Big Book, baby sitting available*, and *closed discussion, baby sitting available*; Wednesdays, *closed beginners*; and Thursdays, *closed discussion, babysitting available*. The last Thursday of the month is an *open anniversary* meeting with *babysitting available*. All meetings are *non-smoking*.

1968

The **Bailey Street Group** began holding Sunday meetings. Secretary was William R. There were ten members. No evidence could be found to indicate when the group stopped meeting.

1971

A group called the **New Chance Study Group** was established in Camp Hill with Robert S. serving as secretary.

1973

A new group formed in **Steelton**; secretary was Ruth L. No information was found to indicate its name or when it stopped meeting.

1974

Pine Street Group

If you're working or shopping anywhere near the State Capitol Building, you have a noon meeting waiting for you within a block or two.

The Pine Street Group was started by Joe B., Bob D., and Jimmy P. in the late summer of 1974 in the basement of Pine Street Presbyterian Church, 3rd & Pine Sts. to make available a Wednesday noon meeting for recovering people in the downtown Harrisburg area.

Membership quickly grew from the initial three to 25, and a Tuesday meeting was added.

In 1995 the meeting moved across the alley to the second floor of the Daily Bread Soup Kitchen building—a part of Pine Street Church—and a Monday meeting was added. Soon the schedule was increased to include every Monday through Friday. All meetings are *closed* and *non-smoking*. The Monday meeting is a *step* meeting; all others are *discussion*.

In addition to a solid core membership, the Pine Street Group draws many visitors. The average attendance is about 25 and frequently swells to as high as 40.

"No satisfaction has been deeper and no joy greater than a Twelfth Step job well done. To watch the eyes of men and women open with wonder as they move from darkness into light, to see their lives quickly fill with new purpose and meaning, and above all to watch them awaken to the presence of a loving God in their lives—these things are the substance of what we receive as we carry A.A.'s message."
Twelve and Twelve—p. 110

21st Street Group history ends: when scheduling of groups to handle rap sessions and speaker meetings at Holy Spirit Hospital became a problem, the **21st Street Group** was formed in 1974 to resolve the matter.

With the approval of the Holy Spirit Hospital administrative staff, the new group held its first Thursday *closed discussion* meeting and Sunday *open speaker* meeting in the hospital's detoxification unit in the solarium on 5 East in early 1975.

Attendance at the Sunday speaker meeting grew rapidly and the overflow from the solarium soon packed the hall on 5 East. The Sunday meetings were then moved to the rear section of the cafeteria and finally to the whole cafeteria to accommodate the 150-200 people regularly in attendance. This was the largest meeting in the area—before or since.

The 21st Street Group continued to supply the Detox with meeting schedules and AA literature and to transport patients to other facilities until, by mutual agreement, the hospital and AA ended its formal relationship in 1997, after a period during which the meetings were moved to several different sites within the hospital.

Eventually, the 21st Street Group became the Bridge Street Group. **See page 54.**

1975

Groups formed this year included **Brothers and Sisters Group**, secretary Willie J., membership 25; and **East 22 Group**, secretary Richard B., membership 22. Neither is still meeting.

"Dr. Bob was my constant companion and partner in the great A.A. adventure. As the physician and great human being that he was, he chose work with others as his prime A.A. vocation and achieved a record which, in quantity and in quality, none will ever surpass. Assisted by the incomparable Sister Ignatia at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron, he—without charge—medically treated and spiritually infused five thousand sufferers."

As Bill Sees It—p. 18

Desire Group

The Desire Group was started and registered by Morgan "Mugs" B. in 1975 for the clients of 818 N. 21st Street, Harrisburg, an Alcohol Services Incorporated (ASI) halfway facility.

The group held meetings Thursdays at 8:30 p.m. and Sundays at 10 a.m. These meetings were supported by many members of the recovering community.

When "818" was closed, the group meetings were transferred to the detox and rehab facilities of ASI at 2835 N. Front St., Harrisburg. The Thursday meeting grew to be too large and Mary J. made arrangements with Lakeside Lutheran Church, Green and Division Sts., to hold meetings in their facilities.

The first Thursday meeting at Lakeside was chaired by a client from the rehab center who had only one week of sobriety.

Jethro W. prepared a format for meetings and contacted GSO to change the group name. On January 6, 1981, the Lakeside Desire Group was officially registered.

Upon the closing of ASI, the Sunday meetings were also held at Lakeside.

The meetings are now held at Our Lady of Blessed Sacrament Church, Third & Woodbine Sts., at 8:30 p.m. Wednesdays, *open speaker*, and 8:30 p.m. Sundays, *closed discussion*. Both meetings are *non-smoking*.

With the move to Blessed Sacrament, the name "Lakeside" was dropped.

1976 New Life Group began Wednesday night meetings; secretary was Betti S. At the time of this writing, the group was no longer meeting.

When Wilson "Red" D. founded the **Millersburg Group** in January 1976, he was breaking pioneer ground in Upper Dauphin County. The tiny group took its meetings (*closed discussions*, Mondays at 7:30 p.m.) first to St. Paul's Lutheran Church, then to the Millersburg Municipal Building, and finally to Wilson's home where it continued until his death in 1994. See page 56 for a story about Millersburg Group's recent revival.

1977

West Shore Area Women's Group

The first women's group in the Harrisburg Area was started by Lucy E. at her home at 201 W. 17th St., Camp Hill, in February of 1977.

Women in the area did not feel free to discuss many physical and emotional problems in a mixed meeting. A poll of the women confirmed the need for such a meeting.



The initial closed meeting, held at 1 p.m. on a Wednesday, was attended by approximately 15 women who afterwards continued to attend on a regular basis.

During the summer of 1977, the group moved to its present location at the Trinity Lutheran Church, Camp Hill.

Regular membership is ten, but attendance ranges from 15 to 20.

The group continues to hold a *closed, non-smoking* meeting at 1 p.m. Wednesdays.

Concordia Group

The Concordia Group held its first closed discussion meeting on Tuesday, April 12, 1977, at Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Main and Rosana Sts., Hummelstown.

The group was started by Sonnie M. who, upon losing her driver's license, found it difficult to attend meetings. Sonnie M., John D., Seth W., Dick F., John B., Leigh L., and Jay H. were the initial members of the group.

Sonnie M. saw the word "concordia" in a church bulletin. She consulted Webster's Dictionary and found that the definition of

(Continued next page)

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"concordia" was "all in harmony for the same purpose." The group agreed upon Concordia for its name.

For the first six months the meeting was "shaky" with only two or three members attending. As attendance grew, some controversy arose regarding visitors from a local rehab, who outnumbered the membership and monopolized the meetings.

According to the group's statement "These recovering people didn't know if they were drug addicts, alcoholics, dual addicts or, in some cases, if they even had a problem."

A group conscience meeting decided that all rehab patients were alcoholic even if they didn't know it yet.

During the first year a group conscience decided that the meetings would never exceed ten or 12 people. A head count was taken at each meeting, and, if too large, the group was split into two or three groups which met in different locations in the room.

This procedure continues today. The group's anniversary meeting is the only exception.

The group now holds meetings, all at 7:30 p.m., on Sundays, *closed discussion*; Mondays, *closed Big Book*; and Tuesdays, *closed discussion*. All are *non-smoking*.

Dillsburg Group

The Dillsburg Group was started on the first Wednesday after Labor Day in 1977. Ed H., of Mechanicsburg, convinced Ed L., of Dillsburg, to start an AA meeting in Dillsburg. This became the first AA meeting in northern York County.

In the beginning, Ed L. opened the meeting room in St. Paul's Lutheran Church, made the coffee, sat, and read the "Big Book"—all alone. He often wondered why he was there. When out of town members and newcomers began to attend meetings, his patience and dedication were rewarded. Membership grew from one to 25.

Members of the group pride themselves on being "serious AA," who will do anything to keep the group alive. When attendance was pretty erratic in the 1980s, for example, members dug into their own pockets to pay the rent to avoid eviction.

Meetings, both at 8:01 p.m. and both *non-smoking*, are Mondays, *closed discussion*, and Fridays, *closed steps and traditions*.

Stay Alive Group—Fairview

The first meeting of the group was in September of 1977 when Dick B. shared his experience, strength and hope with Bob G., of Fairview Township.

Bob G. died in an alcohol related fire, and his death motivated Dick B. to contact the township fire chief and request permission to hold Sunday meetings at 9 a.m. in the fire company hall, Rte. 114, Lewisberry Rd., New Cumberland. Permission was granted. The Stay Alive Group was so named because of Bob G.'s death.

The first three Sunday's Dick kept himself company. Shirley W. was the second member to attend, later to be joined by Matt Mc. and Betty S.

Dick used the ASI van to transport patients from "818," Alcohol Services Incorporated (ASI) halfway house, to the meetings.

After Joe B., Joe S., and others chaired the meeting, the Stay Alive Group "took off." Membership of the group is now 25, but attendance has reached 65-70.

The group continues to meet Sundays at 9 a.m. for a *closed discussion* meeting, except for the last Sunday of the month which is a *closed anniversary* meeting.

1978

Lambda

On April 17, 1978, a group of gay recovering alcoholics gathered at Friends Meeting House in Harrisburg to discuss their needs.

They called themselves "gay alcoholics all together" and used the principles of the AA program.

At the first meeting were Sheila D., Gloria M., Shirley W., Sandra M., and Dennis S., who was making this his first AA meeting and went on to become the group's first GSR.

News of the meeting spread by word of mouth and in the following year the group officially registered with GSO as Lambda Group. As a special interest group, primarily for lesbians and gay men, Lambda Group was intended to fill a previously unmet need.

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The group's statement of policy maintains that "we of the Lambda Group are gay alcoholics; however, we are at this meeting because we are alcoholics, not because we are gay." Lambda is the only registered group of gay alcoholics within District 36.

The group holds *closed discussion* meetings on Mondays at 8 p.m. and Fridays at 8:30 p.m. at Friends Meeting House, Herr and 6th Sts, Harrisburg. The last Friday meeting of each month is an *open speaker* meeting. Both meetings are *non-smoking*. Attendance averages approximately 40 members.

1980 Winner's Circle Group

During July, 1980, Wilbur T. and Dave R. started the Winner's Circle Group at Penn National Race Track, Grantville, Pa.

Wilbur T. wanted to stay sober and did not have a way to attend meetings, so he and Dave R. started a meeting at the track.

The first open discussion meeting, Tuesday at 8:30 p.m. was held near the "back stretch" of the track in the chaplain's office. It was attended by eight members.



The group needed more space, so they moved into the track's kitchen. Since this location interfered

with employee activities, the meeting was moved to the "Brickhouse." Located at the "North Gate," the Brickhouse was more easily found by visiting members of other groups.

The meetings, originally held on the second floor, were later moved to the first floor.

Finally, for a number of reasons, the meeting was moved to Union Deposit United Methodist Church, 34 W. Main, one mile west of Rte. 39.

Meetings (*open discussion, non-smoking*) are held Mondays at 7:30 p.m.

Membership is approximately 15.

Group histories continue on page 36

Working Together...

Harrisburg Area Intergroup



It was at this point in our history that Harrisburg Area Intergroup was formed, so the next several pages of this booklet are devoted to Intergroup—its history and a description of its most visible functions.

History of Harrisburg Area Intergroup

"I place my hand in yours because together we can do what none of us can do by ourselves."

That one sentence perfectly defines Harrisburg Area Intergroup. It tells us why it was formed and what it is intended to do.



As late as 1970, there still was only a handful of AA groups in the Harrisburg area.

Life was pretty simple.

The "grapevine" carried all the

significant news of the day.

Everyone knew the scant schedule of meetings throughout the area.

And if a special task needed attending to ("We need to talk to Joe's brother in the hospital") a simple phone call or two would bring out more than enough members eager to pass on the gift they had been given by AA. But things changed.

The handful of groups became dozens.

And what had been a few hundred members now numbered in the thousands.

Coordinating and assisting in the delivery of services for such a rapidly growing AA community was obviously more than a single group or individual could possibly handle.

But all the groups together? Perhaps.

So it was that on August 26, 1980, representatives of five groups sat down for the first meeting of the Harrisburg Intergroup.

They were Moses B., Hershey Group; Leigh L., 19th Street Group; Helen M., West Shore Area Group; Lucy E., West Shore Area Women's Group; and Pat W., 21st Street Group.

At that very first meeting, the Intergroup took on three major tasks:

- 1) combine East Shore and West Shore telephone answering services into one central "hotline" to serve the Harrisburg area;
- 2) consolidate the printing of various group schedules into one schedule;
- 3) commit the Harrisburg Intergroup to carrying the message to correctional institutions.

Intergroup By-Laws, approved July 27, 1981, broadened the purpose to provide for a simple organization, consisting of a representative of each AA group in the area "to assist and stimulate local AA groups and to foster and encourage the unity of service of the AA legacy."

All meetings of the Intergroup are held at Fellowship House the first Thursday of each month, with anywhere from 25 to 35 groups represented.

As the need for additional coordinated services has increased, so too has the list of committees designed to carry out these services.

They now include, in addition to those already mentioned, Service, Hospital, Public Information, Archives, Literature, and Sobriety News.

All registered groups in the Harrisburg area may be a member of Intergroup. There are no mandated fees assessed on any group at any time, although the following of General Service Guidelines is encouraged.

And Intergroup has no control over the internal affairs or conduct of any member group.

The aim of Intergroup is simple: to gain the unity and strength necessary to meet and solve problems that would be too much for any single group to handle.

If your group isn't now active with Intergroup, it can be just by sending a representative to a meeting.

It takes all of us, pulling together, to carry the message.

State Hospital

Meetings at the Harrisburg State Hospital enjoyed a re-birth in 1999 and early 2000 after a couple years of on again, off again activity.

Attendance was reported in February, 2000, as "strong and steady for the past seven-eight months."

The new coordinator, Dennis H., has begun to recruit groups to cover the meetings for a month at a time. He has coverage through most of the summer, 2000, and individuals from Carlisle area are filling in the gaps, but volunteer groups are needed.

AA Hotline

To the desperate drunk with nowhere else to turn, that call to the AA hotline might just be the first step on the road to sobriety.

To a visitor from out of town looking for a meeting, it could be the difference between a white-knuckle night alone in a motel or a warm evening of sharing with other recovering alcoholics.

Or it could be one more clean and sober night to a nervous newcomer who, in her solitude, needs help to see the other side of that drink she thinks she needs.

No matter who the caller or what the need, the AA hotline has been offering an encouraging voice of recovery to alcoholics in the Harrisburg area for decades.

For years, the hotline was operated by the 19th Street Group, but the expense became too much

for the group, so it became one of the three functions for which the Harrisburg Area Intergroup was formed in 1980.

And under Intergroup, the hotline flourished.

Today, however, the hotline faces a disheartening reality—not enough volunteers to man the phones during the daytime hours for which coverage is expected.

At the start of the year 2000, the schedule called for the hotline to be manned by AA volunteers from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday. Nighttime hours and weekends are covered by the Medical Bureau, a commercial answering service.

But at the end of 1999 there were only four volunteers, plus two in training. The phones were being covered less than half the scheduled time.

When the Medical Bureau receives an AA-related call, it is forwarded to a designated volunteer in the caller's home area.

But when the Medical Bureau handles a daytime call, there often is no recovering alcoholic available at home to take the relay from the bureau.



At the end of 1999, Don S., the hotline's representative to Intergroup, estimated monthly calls at around 50, "far below what we had been experiencing in the recent past."

When Intergroup first implemented the hotline, it used a little room off the Fellowship House kitchen as an office. At that time, volunteers were available for all work slots.

In 1984, Medical Bureau began covering night calls.

About a year after that, the Intergroup "central office" and the hotline were moved to Kline Village.

Upon completion of the Fellowship House renovation, the office and the hotline were moved "back home."

"This is great 12th Step work," said Tina H., a hotline volunteer.

"No matter how I feel coming in here, one call can make all the difference. And when you see one of your callers come through the door for a meeting, you know you've made a difference.

"I can't think of a better thing sponsors could do for their pigeons than to urge them to come in here and help out."

Corrections Committee

Anyone seeking an answer to the question "Why an Intergroup?" need look no further than the efforts of AA to carry the message to Dauphin County Prison (DCP).

Once conducted casually by a handful of AA members, the program now reaches out to all segments of the prison population, prison staff members, and those inmates, men and women, taking their first steps to freedom.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the inmate population was approximately 500. Since then the prison has had three or four expansion projects and the population is approximately 1,500 and still growing.



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During the late 1970s and early 1980s, recovering alcoholics who desired to carry the AA message to DCP did it for personal friends and relatives; no clearance was required and prison AA was for men only.

As interest in carrying the message to DCP grew—along with the numbers of AA groups in the Harrisburg Area—three or four AAs from different groups arranged with DCP treatment staff to set aside a specific time and place where AA meetings could be held for inmates who had a problem with alcohol and wanted to become sober.

At that time the deputy warden for treatment was in AA himself and he provided tremendous support to our program as well as enlightenment to the staff on this matter.

Soon the support came not only from the deputy warden for treatment and his staff but also the warden and the chaplain's office and staff. The warden, with county commissioners' approval, instituted a strict volunteer-approval program for all who wished to bring the AA message into the prison.

At the same time, the number of inmates permitted to receive the message was expanded to include those on work release and in halfway houses, women, and juvenile guests. The volunteers also provided workshops for the chaplain's office and the treatment consultative staff and continually stocked literature supplies.

The prison outreach program also provides an annual appreciation dinner for all volunteers.

In response to this ambitious agenda, Harrisburg Intergroup, including support from Perry and Cumberland County groups, formed a Corrections Committee to coordinate and unify the prison effort, which now includes the following:

- 1) an increased number of men and women participating in meetings;
- 2) ample supplies of pamphlets, books and tapes provided by Intergroup and various individual AA groups;
- 3) a series of workshops for the Prison Chaplains Ministerial Association, parole officers, treatment staff members, and the AA recovering community as a whole;
- 4) establishment of the "Bridging the Gap" approach to help-

ing newly discharged inmates get to their first meeting outside the prison and helping them start to develop a network of friends;

5) cooperation with other districts to coordinate prison activities throughout Pennsylvania.

"Working with this program has been extremely rewarding and has helped a good many AA members stay sober," said Moses B., chairman of the Corrections Committee.

"Of course, we always welcome new volunteers to take part in this effort."

Dauphin County Prison Women's Program

In terms of sheer numbers, the Dauphin County Prison women's program has to rank right up there near the top.

According to Frances L., who has been with the program since its start around 1987, and Renee L., another long-term volunteer, anywhere up to 80 women attend the meetings, which are held Fridays at 7:30 p.m.

"Our biggest problem," said Frances, "is getting volunteers from the ranks of recovering women in the groups. They either don't have the time or won't make the time.

Frances said that in her 13 years with the program, she has seen a gratifying number of women attending meetings and getting active in AA groups after their releases from prison.

Cumberland Prison

During the fall of 1981, an AA member who was then an inmate of the Cumberland County Prison (CCP), asked the warden and his chaplain about the possibility of having weekly prison AA meetings.

The request was brought to the Carlisle Group by Col. Ed Mc., a member who had been contacted by the warden and chaplain. At the Carlisle Group's next group conscience meeting several members agreed to sponsor the CCP meetings.

An idea was adopted that the first six sessions would be speaker meetings and that each speaker would be an AA member who had spent time in the Carlisle jail.

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Camp Hill Prison

Jim D., our District #36 committee member (DCM) in the late 1980s, must have sometimes thought that it was harder to get into jail than it was to get out—at least where AA was concerned.

The whole thing started when Jim tried to register a *joint AA/NA meeting* at Camp Hill State Correctional Institution as an AA group.

No go!

AA World Services suggested he take another look at the *Twelve Traditions*, which discourage outside affiliations.

Jim then contacted the director of the prison drug and alcohol program, and the director readily agreed with the objective of having separate AA and NA meetings in addition to a generic 12-step discussion group.

Jim got so far as presenting an informational talk to 40 potential AA members, and everything appeared to be full speed ahead.

Not quite.

The talk must have been a little too incendiary, for severe rioting broke out throughout the prison.

"I have been assured that my talk had nothing to do with the riots," claimed Jim.

Nonetheless, plans for launching AA meetings at Camp Hill were put on hold.

Finally, in 1990, the prison requested that an AA meeting be started. The fellowship responded, pledging to cover two nights each week with outside AA members in attendance.

Soon 12 volunteers gained security clearance and started the meetings, which continue to this day.

Inmates usually chair the meetings, but AA member attendance is crucial to keeping them in touch the total AA fellowship and its principles.

In addition to cleared volunteers, outside visitors may attend meetings so long as they call in advance for gate clearance. Either visitor or long-term clearance can be arranged by contacting Jim D. through the Intergroup office at the Fellowship House.

"This is great 12th Step work, so there's no such thing as having too many volunteers on hand," said Jim.

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These meetings, held Wednesdays at 8 p.m., sparked interest in AA by the attending inmates and good seeds were planted.

Eventually the meetings became discussion meetings with good turnouts until some dissension in the ranks of some of the Carlisle Area Group's members resulted in a drop of attendance at AA meetings.

Shortly thereafter, Gary S., of Harrisburg, and John R., of Dillsburg started an NA at the prison on Tuesdays, and this adversely affected attendance at the AA meetings because approximately 90 per cent of the inmates were under twenty-five and were addicted to drugs other than alcohol.

The meetings, however, continued every Wednesday with Dick S., Bill C., and John Z. chairing until sometime in the late 1980s when, due to a lack of AA support, the meetings stopped altogether.

In 1990 or 1991, the CCP's assistant warden in charge of volunteer groups approached the Carlisle Area Group with a request to re-establish the prison meetings. Chet A. agreed to the proposition with the condition that nine volunteers, three from each of the Cumberland County groups, would participate. The plan was acceptable, and after all volunteering members were approved by the prison, meetings were held on Fridays at 7 p.m.

There are now four Cumberland groups supplying a total of 12 volunteers—three for each meeting, once per month.

Perry County Prison

Bill L. chairs a weekly AA meeting at the Perry County Prison.

Cumberland County Women's Prison Meeting

After several years' hiatus, the Cumberland County women's prison meeting was restarted in 1998. The women meet at 7 p.m. on Tuesday nights.

By January, 2000, three volunteers---Jody, Debbie, and Gail---chaired and shared on a rotating basis with five to 15 inmates.

Usually a story from the Big Book is read and discussed or a discussion meeting is held.

Sobriety News



Although the earliest history of *Sobriety News* is sketchy, We do know that Joe O. edited the first issue in March, 1983, and previous AA histories indicate that the newspaper, in one form or another, was published since then, with some breaks in the continuity of the schedule. After one of these recent publishing inter-

ruptions, Intergroup records heralded the return of *Sobriety News* in August, 1996, with an apology for "any inconvenience the lack of a newsletter had caused."

Tim and Allyson W. were the editors, and apparently Allyson continued publication through mid-1998, with an annual subscription carrying a \$7 price tag.

Other recent editors were Gail S., Geneva B., and Laird L. In January, 1999, Brian F. was asked by Intergroup to take over as editor, and *Sobriety News* has been published monthly since February, 1999, at no cost to subscribers.

While some "hard copies" of the newsletter are still printed, most of the circulation is handled via e-mail, and in recent months it has grown from black and white to include color.

A sampling of editions shows a wide variety of stories about group anniversaries, speakers at local meetings, social activities, highlights of Intergroup meetings, international convention details, reviews of *Grapevine* articles, and news about various events of interest to AA members.

As the century ended, Brian F. was seeking to take a giant leap into cyberspace with expansion of the newsletter to the internet.

The December, 1999, issue was, in fact, not e-mailed but posted as a web page, making delivery and reception easier for nearly 150 subscribers.



Henrietta completes the circle

Any history of AA is incomplete without the story of our founders' relationships with the Oxford Movement.

And perhaps the most fascinating of those relationships involved Henrietta Seiberling, who had married into the Goodyear rubber dynasty in Akron. Henrietta was a member of an Akron Oxford Group that included Dr. Bob S., who had admitted to the group early in April, 1935, his problem with alcohol—a problem they were, of course, already well aware of.



As was the practice, the members—individually and as a group—prayed daily for God to send someone to help Dr. Bob.

Now, it was on Mother's Day weekend of 1935 that Bill W. found himself in Akron, alone with \$10 in his pocket and a failed business deal to show for his travels there.

He wanted very much to drink—just five months after having God light up his room!

In the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel, he came across a list of clergy, and he began calling, asking if they knew any drunks who needed help, for he knew that was the only way he would stay sober.

The *last one* on the list steered him to Henrietta, who now would forge the last link in the AA chain.

"I'm a rummy who has a way to fix drunks," Bill said in a phone call to Henrietta, a woman of immense faith.

"Of course you are," she replied to the disembodied voice.

"We've been expecting you. Come out here immediately."

Bill headed out to the gate house (above) of the Seiberling mansion.

A call from Henrietta to Dr. Bob's house revealed that Bob was already drunk that day, but Bob's wife Anne said they'd be over the next day.

Bob agreed to "meet that mug for 15 minutes," but ended up talking to him for five hours. "He was the only human I had ever met who knew what he was talking about regarding alcoholism," Bob said.

After one more roaring binge, Dr. Bob got sober on June 10, 1935. And there started the history of AA. Soon it would reach out its hand to us in Harrisburg.

Mechanicsburg Serenity Group

Newcomers, especially, ought to make this meeting a required stop on their road to recovery.

For several years, members from Dillsburg, Carlisle, York Springs, and Mechanicsburg had discussed starting a meeting in Mechanicsburg.



These recovering people had to travel to either Camp Hill or to Harrisburg for meetings. An influx of newcomers was another reason for the need of a meeting in Mechanicsburg.

In August of 1981, Randy, Jim B., and Matt Mc. started the Serenity Group. The

meeting they started then (*closed discussion, non-smoking*) is still held in the Presbyterian Church, 300 East Simpson Ferry Rd., Mechanicsburg, on Mondays at 8:30 p.m.

A *step meeting* was started on Thursdays at 8:30 p.m. in 1982 but was discontinued because of poor attendance.

Newcomers are encouraged to stick around after the meetings to hear John S. share his experience, strength, and hope through stories such as "Twenty Years Between Meetings Doesn't Make It," "How I lost My Stripes and My Teeth in the Same Day," and his famous tale, "Hit and Run of a Freight Train."

Attendance currently averages about 17.

Women's Serenity Group

In 1981, Ruth Z. started a full-time job and could no longer attend the weekly afternoon women's meeting in Camp Hill. She was interested in starting an early evening meeting that could be attended directly from the work place.

Ruth called several churches in an attempt to secure meeting space but was unsuccessful. She then contacted Leo Mc., of the Holy Spirit Hospital Detoxification Unit, and received permission to hold meetings in the detox classroom.

Ruth Z., Helen M., Shirley F., and Marilyn B. were involved in

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getting the meetings started. Mondays at 6 p.m. was chosen since there were no other meetings in the area at that time.

The Women's Serenity Group worked in conjunction with the detox; all female patients were required to attend the group's meetings.

In two years, the group outgrew the classroom's capacity and relocated to the detox unit solarium.

In 1985, when once again more space was needed to accommodate growing attendance, the group moved to Trinity Lutheran Church in Camp Hill.

The Women's Serenity Group continued its service to female patients of the detox unit by sending two members to the hospital every Monday evening until 1986 when Harrisburg Area Intergroup assumed the responsibility.

In 1990, a group conscience the need for a *beginners* meeting, so apce was acquired at Trinity for 6 p.m. each Thursday. The meeting time later was advanced to 6:15 p.m. at the request of Trinity personnel.

The Monday group continues to hold a closed meeting at 6 p.m. Originally attended by approximately ten members, it now attracts 30-35 weekly. Attendance at the beginners meeting ranges from eight to 20 women. Both meetings are non-smoking.

* * *

The Wellsville Group, which first met in 1982, was no longer meeting at the time of this writing.

* * *

Dick B. initiated a closed discussion meeting for the clients of the **First Step Program** at 1838 N. Second St. The group no longer exists.



Late Night Group

In October, 1983, a Saturday midnight candlelight meeting was started at the Fellowship House, 1251 S. 19th St., Harrisburg.

Meetings were held under the auspices of the Fellowship House Executive Committee with George C. and Renee B. responsible for the meetings and the housekeeping chores. Average attendance was ten-12.

Candles and candlesticks rapidly disappeared between meeting dates until one night there were none on hand. George C. filled styrofoam cups with quick-setting plaster, inserted candles, and the candlelight meeting was held. Those makeshift candle holders and candles lasted for several meetings.

In the spring of 1985, a second candlelight meeting was added on Friday at 11 p.m.

A desire was expressed to register the group but that was voted down. Unhappiness with the decision led to the formation of a registered group meeting Sundays and Wednesdays at 11 p.m. This was initiated by Jerry Y.

Meetings were expanded to include Sundays through Thursdays.

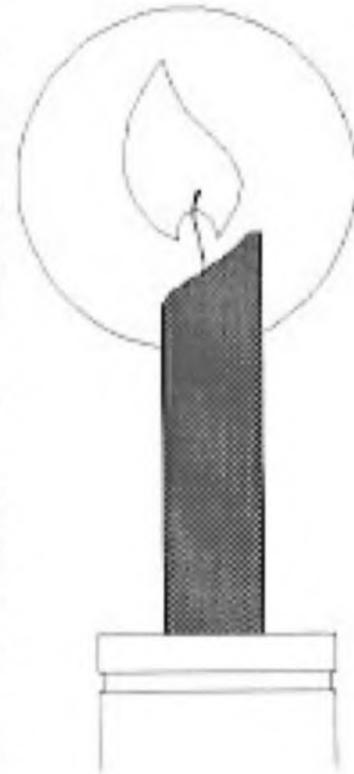
During 1988 the two groups blended. The Late night Group assumed responsibility for Friday and Saturday meetings.

The group now schedules meetings five nights per week: Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays at 11:15 p.m., *closed discussion*; Thursdays, 11:15 p.m., *open discussion*; and Fridays, 11 p.m. *closed discussion*.

The average attendance throughout the week is ten.

AA is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die.

As Bill Sees It--p. 13



1984

Progress Group

In 1984, Nancy G., using a borrowed coffee pot and the support of ten men and women, held the first meeting of the Progress Group in her home.

The meeting was one of the first non-smoking meetings available in the Harrisburg area. The objective of this meeting was to place special emphasis on welcoming newcomers and focusing on the 12 steps.

Later, the Progress Group relocated to the Ridgeway Community Church at Elmerton St. & Progress Ave., Susquehanna Township. A group conscience decision later changed the meeting from closed to an open discussion meeting.

Today it's two meetings, both on Wednesday evenings.

At 7:15 it's a *closed speaker* meeting, and at 8:30, it's an *open discussion*. Both are *non-smoking*.

1985

The **Upper Dauphin Group** was formed in March, 1985, in the home of Bill C. and enjoyed varying levels of support.

In August of 1987, when the meeting had outgrown Bill's home, it was moved to a ramshackle old house in Fisherville, then to a newly constructed educational wing of Messiah Lutheran Church.

The group had a steady membership of 12-15 at the old house, but for some reason membership declined when the group moved to the church. Meetings were discontinued in 1993 for lack of attendance. See *Fisherville Group* for a story of re-birth on page 57.

* * *

The **Walnut Bottom Group** meeting was started at the Helen Stevens facility on Walnut Bottom Road in August, 1985, by Bob R. because there were only two AA meetings in Carlisle. In 1998 the group merged with the Happy Destiny Group and took on its name. See *Happy Destiny* on page 56.

1986

Sunday Night Group

In December of 1986, Gene H. began discussions with Joe W., Had C., Jim A., Craig S., Amy B., and Kim F. regarding the need for having a Sunday night meeting in Carlisle.

The idea was to provide a local meeting as an alternative to the long drive to attend other existing meetings. The primary interest of this group's founders was the newcomer.

The initial meeting of the Sunday Night Group was held February 8, 1987, at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Carlisle, with seven members in attendance. The group has since grown to approximately 25. The 7:30 meetings retain the *open discussion, non-smoking* format as of the end of 1999.

Colonial Park Group

The Colonial Park Group was started by Pat D. in January of 1986. This was the first group in the Colonial Park area.

The initial meeting, in the parlor of Colonial Park United Methodist Church, was attended by six members.

In the early 1990s, the group moved to Paxton United Methodist Church at 450 Colonial Rd. in Colonial Park.

The group holds *open beginner* meetings Mondays at 8 p.m.; *closed Big Book* meetings at 8 p.m. Thursdays; and *closed steps and traditions* meeting at 8 p.m. Friday. All are non-smoking. Average attendance is ten-12.

Serenely remarking to his attendant, "I think this is it," Dr. Bob passed out of our sight and hearing November 16, 1950 at noonday. So ended the consuming malady (cancer) wherein he had so well shown us how high faith can rise over grievous distress. As he had lived, so he had died, supremely aware that in his Father's house are many mansions.

Bill W., January, 1951 *Grapevine*

New Beginnings Group

Ken D. and Deb, both from New Bloomfield, were in counseling together when they decided to form an AA group in their home town in 1986.

After starting with a closed discussion meeting on Mondays at St. Bernard's Catholic Church, Main Street, New Bloomfield, the New Beginnings group moved to Keboch Methodist Church, at main and Church Sts. in New Bloomfield.

Today the group holds two meetings—a *closed discussion* at 7 p.m. Mondays and an *open discussion* at 8 p.m. Thursdays. Both are *non-smoking*.

The group's membership has grown from two to eight. Attendance at meetings is ten-18.

* * *

Stoney Creek Group was started in 1986 by Priscilla S. in Dauphin. The group stopped meeting in 1994.

* * *

Lykens Winding it Up Group

Kris L., Rhonda S., Bill B., and Steve L. were new to the community in 1987. To their dismay they found that there were no AA meetings in the immediate Lykens area.

They decided to start one close to home.

The first *open discussion* meeting was held in Our Lady of Help Christian Church, 732 Main St., Lykens, at 7 p.m. on a Monday in May, 1987. In July a Friday *open discussion* meeting was added to the schedule.

Meetings are now held at 7 p.m. Sunday, *open discussion*, and 7 p.m. Thursday, *open discussion*. The first Sunday and third Thursday of each month are *Big Book* meetings. Smoking is permitted. Attendance averages ten to 15 members.

To get to Lykens and the Winding it Up meeting, drive east on Rte. 209 from Elizabethtown to the east end of Lykens (about seven miles). At the IGA Food Market, turn right at the next intersection and then turn left at the first alley (100-200 feet). Park behind the Catholic Church education center and go to the second floor via the outside metal staircase. Watch the third step.

1987

40th Street Group

The 40th Street Group was started by Leo B. and Jan D. on April 24, 1987. Meetings are held in the Rectors Meeting Room of St. Catherine Laboure Church, 40th and Derry Sts., Harrisburg.

The reason for starting this meeting was that there wasn't a Friday evening discussion group anywhere else on the East Shore.

Continued growth has resulted in an almost weeklong meeting schedule as follows: Sunday, 4 p.m., *closed steps and traditions (second Sunday closed Big Book)*; Tuesday, 7 p.m., *closed discussion*; Wednesday, 7 p.m., *women's closed discussion*; Friday, 8 p.m., *closed discussion*, except first Friday of month, which is an *open speaker*; Saturday, 8 p.m., *open discussion*. All meetings are *non-smoking*.

1988

Ain't You Had Enough Group

This group was formed on March 21, 1988, because Forrest B. and others determined a need for an AA meeting in Carlisle on Monday nights.

The meetings were held at Dickinson College, Holland Union Building, Women's Center. The group continues to enjoy the "blessings" of the College's administration and student counseling departments.

It had a small but consistent turnout with a promise of steady growth. By 1999, the group was continuing to hold *open discussion* meetings at 8 p.m. Mondays in Denny Hall at Dickinson. Attendance averages 25-35.

* * *

First Things First Group: What had been the Pink Pony, a rollicking roadhouse on Rte. 322 north of the Borough of Dauphin, became Serenity Lodge and the home of First Things First Group on August 4, 1989. In 1995, the group ceased to exist when the real estate was sold, and shortly thereafter the state purchased the building as its relocation headquarters in connection with the Dauphin By-Pass construction project.

Lemoyne Men's Group

Bill L. started this men's group in June, 1988 with five recovering men in attendance. The group holds a *closed discussion, non-smoking* meeting for men at 8 p.m. Thursdays in Grace Methodist Church, 313 Herman Avenue, Lemoyne.

The purpose of this meeting is to allow men to share their experience, strength and hope by examining the effects of alcoholism from a man's perspective.

"We must remember that the men we once were will drink again, but the men that we can become won't have to. Frank talk is welcomed," the group's statement said.

"We don't take each other's inventory nor do we give advice without being asked to do so."

Currently eight to 12 members attend each meeting.

Carlisle Women's Group

Sue L. and Geiri H. discussed the need for a women's AA meeting in Carlisle. While attending various AA meetings they asked other women if they agreed to this need, and the response was a definite "yes."

A suitable meeting place was arranged at the Carlisle Army Barracks. Sunday 7 p.m. meetings were chosen to provide women with children an opportunity to attend with a minimum of family conflict.

The response has been most gratifying. Beginning with eight to ten women in October of 1988, the group has grown to 20-25 in attendance at each meeting. The *closed discussion non-smoking* meetings are now held in Denny Hall at Dickinson College, Room 114. W. High & N. West Sts.

Every Sunday new faces are seen and all members agree that it is a super great meeting.

* * *

The Millerstown Group, which was started in 1988, no longer meets.

1989

Survivors Group

During the 1980s there were various meetings in the Middletown area. One met in a church for a while and also at Penn State Campus. Another met at the town hall in Highspire. It was difficult to find a regular meeting place.

In the summer of 1989, John and Heide M. went looking for a location to start a new Middletown meeting, and St. Peter's Lutheran Church offered a Sunday School room on the second floor.

John and Heide decided to start the meeting, even if they were the only two people sitting at the table. Since there were no kitchen facilities, coffee had to be brought from home.

Within a month, a solid nucleus had formed. Early members included Bob H., Cheryl H., Jim S., Kathy S., Jim P., Joyce P., Jayne S., Roy, Denise, Ken D., Bill K., and Sherry.

The group soon found a permanent home at Middletown Presbyterian Church, where the meeting, *closed discussion, non-smoking*, is now held on Thursdays at 7 p.m. The last Thursday of the month is *closed steps & traditions, also non-smoking*. Regular attendance has grown to about 25-30 members.

There's More to Life Group

In the spring of 1989 Judy S. was looking for a mixed group interested in "all life has to offer the recovering individual." And she wanted a meeting early enough so she could get to it right after work and leave time for all that other good stuff in the evening.

Out of that wild dream was born the There's More to Life Group.

Today more than 100 members—from just about everywhere in the Harrisburg area—call TMTL their home group. Attendance at seven meetings per week averages 50, and the group is serving the district and Intergroup consistently.

Their weekly schedule begins Sundays at 6:15 p.m., with a *closed non-smoking Step 11* meeting at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, 20th & Market Sts. Camp Hill.

The rest of the meetings are all at Community United Church and are all *non-smoking and closed except the anniversary meet-*

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ing.. They include Mondays at 6 p.m., *discussion*; Tuesdays at 6 p.m., *steps and traditions*; Thursdays at 6 p.m., *Big Book*; Fridays at 6 p.m. *discussion*, except last Friday each month, *open anniversary speaker*. Saturdays at 8:30 a.m. and 10 a.m., are both *discussion*.

The 8:30 a.m. Saturday meeting was added in 1998 to accommodate the over-capacity crowds at the 10 a.m. meeting. Now attendance at the early morning meeting, too, is starting to swell.

In a general statement, the TMTLG says: "We welcome newcomer and old-timer alike and feel there is a place for everyone in our group."

"With God's help, with the encouragement of our membership, and with the continued dedication to serving our members, TMTLG will continue to be a healthy and growing group."

Rebellion Dogs Group

George A. of Carlisle wanted a noon West Shore meeting that concentrated on the 12 steps and 12 traditions.

George received permission to have Monday noon meetings at the Presbyterian Church on 300 Simpson Ferry Rd. (at Sheperdstown Rd.) in Mechanicsburg.

The group's first meeting, all men, was held March 20, 1989. A year later a few women started to attend, and the group has remained at 12-16 members to this day. Meetings are *closed steps and traditions*.

The group's name, which has drawn many smiles and chuckles over the years, was found on page 74 of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*: "A whole life-time geared to self-centeredness cannot be set in reverse all at once. *Rebellion dogs our every step at first.*"



Where you're at Today Group began meeting at Trinity Lutheran Church, Camp Hill, in 1989. The group no longer meets.

1991

Trudgers Group

The Trudgers Group of Middletown held its first meeting on March 19, 1991.

It was the success of the Survivors Group of Middletown that spawned the Trudgers after several members of the Survivors decided there was a need for two meetings in Middletown.

There was much discussion over what to name the new group. Some members wanted to name it "The River Rats Group;" others wanted to name it "Trudgers," a suggestion by a member who attended a "Trudgers" group in California—a group with a reputation for "boot camp" style AA. A vote was taken and "Trudgers" won.

Early members included Bob H., Cheryl H., Jim P., Jolene H., Howard H., Kelly R., John M., Heidi M., Alan C., Jean, Larry L., Vicki S., Dave M., Bill K., and Sherry K.

The group holds an *open Big Book* meeting Tuesdays at 7 p.m. at the Presbyterian Church, on the corner of Union and Market Sts. in Middletown and has a regular attendance of 20-30 people. The last Tuesday of each month is an *open anniversary* meeting. All meetings are *non-smoking*.

Up the Creek Group

The name doesn't mean they're all in trouble. It means they're up the creek---in Marysville.

The group was started in 1991 by Ron H. and Mike C. because the only other meeting in Perry County at the time was the New Beginnings Group in New Bloomfield. The group holds a *closed, non-smoking, discussion* meeting Thursdays at 9 p.m. at the Wesley



United Methodist Church, 450 Sylvan St., Marysville.



1992

Primary Purpose

Members looking for a variety of noon meetings should head to Carlisle.

The Primary Purpose Group—formed in January, 1992, in response to a call for more noon meetings—holds open meetings Tuesdays (*discussion of AA Literature*), Thursdays (*discussion*) and Fridays (*Step*) at St. John's Episcopal Church, On the Square, in Carlisle. All are non-smoking.

The meetings have been popular. After starting with just Tuesday and Friday meetings, the group added the Thursday meeting in 1997. Attendance averages 12-14 members.

Double Trouble

Depending on whom you talk to, the Double Trouble Group at Edgewater Psychiatric Center, 1829 N. Front St., Harrisburg, started eight or ten years ago.

Priscilla F., current Intergroup rep, says it's eight years, so we'll put it at 1992.

"Regardless of when we started, there are some real miracles going on here," said Priscilla.

"The mere fact that many of these folks are staying sober in spite of some other very serious problems is a miracle in itself.

"We get our share of relapses but as people come back from a slip, it seems their sober times are getting longer and longer."

Double Trouble—for dually diagnosed alcoholics—meets Wednesdays and Fridays at 7:30 p.m. for *closed discussion*. Both meetings are *non smoking*.

Attendance runs anywhere from 12 to 28.

All we need

"We of A.A. obey spiritual principles, at first because we must, then because we ought to, and ultimately because we love the kind of life such obedience brings. Great suffering and great love are A.A.'s disciplinarians; we need no others."—p. 27 "As Bill Sees It."

New Beginnings (Mechanicsburg)

The New Beginnings group started in 1992 as a spinoff from a Monday night meeting that sweltered through the summer months without air-conditioning in a Mechanicsburg church.

Fred W., Ray N., Lisa F., and Dave decided to look for cooler environs, and the New Beginnings Group took root.

"It's been up and down, like most AA groups," said Fred N. "Some have moved, some died, but Lisa and I have hung in there."

Sometimes, in fact, it was only Lisa and Fred, but they've seen the group expand to eight to 12 regulars today.

"Some meetings have been really impressive with upwards of 20 in attendance," Fred said.

The group gets together Tuesdays at 8 p.m. at the Town and Country Baptist Church at Rte. 114 and Old Gettysburg Rd. (Take Mechanicsburg Exit off Rte 15) for a *closed discussion, non-smoking* meeting.

"Most people who attend once and return for any length of time are impressed by the honest, no frills atmosphere," said Fred.

1993

City Limits Group

When the City Limits Group held its first meeting in August, 1993, and 27 members showed up, the group no doubt thought money would be the least of its problems.

But, as usual, attendance leveled off, and so did the Seventh Tradition collections.

"We had trouble making the rent money, and we wanted to buy anniversary chips but we definitely couldn't afford that expense," said Harold W., one of the group's founders.

Just when things were looking their bleakest, the collection basket came back with a \$100 bill neatly tucked under the change and one dollar bills.

"And of course the donation was anonymous," said Harold.

That little bonanza was surely a sign of things to come, for the meeting has been going strong ever since.

The City Limits Group was formed to fill a need in the neighborhood of the United Methodist Church at 29th & Derry Street at

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the Harrisburg-Paxtang line and to provide a meeting that fell between the 4:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. meetings at the Fellowship House. So the group holds a *non-smoking, closed discussion Big Book* meeting at the Methodist Church on Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m.

Over the years attendance went from an average of eight to as many as 12-20 people attending. Attendance now once again averages eight.

Keep it Simple Group

Keep it Simple Group was started in 1993 by members of Walnut Bottom Group who felt the need to have a Big Book meeting in Carlisle.

The group meets at Waggoner's Gap United Methodist Church on Wednesdays at 8:30 p.m. Bob C., Chris K., Fran W. and Cliff F. have all been active in keeping the AA message alive at this meeting.

The meeting is *open Big Book* and *non-smoking*.

1994

Back to Basics

The nearest anyone can pinpoint the beginning of the Back to Basics Group is 1994; but *why* it started is no mystery at all.

"The pastor of the Yocumtown Church of God in Etters asked us to start the group," said Jeff B. "The interesting thing is that no one from the church membership ever attended a meeting, but for us it was a real blessing."

Jeff recalls one time when the meeting got crowded out by a church function.

"That didn't stop us. We just put up chairs in the parking lot and had our meeting anyway."

Back to Basics Group holds a *closed approved literature, non-smoking* meeting on Fridays at 7 p.m. in the Yocumtown Church, 160 Red Mill Road, Etters.

Attendance averages six members.

1995

Chapter 5—How It Works Group

The story about "How it Works" has been a story about how we grow.

In February, 1995, about eight to ten AA members, most of them women, got together at Trinity Lutheran Church, 20th & Market Sts., Camp Hill, to discuss what they saw as a very basic AA need—a meeting to discuss Chapter 5 principles only.

They've been at it ever since—holding a *closed discussion, non-smoking* meeting Friday noons.

At first, attendance was very small, but then it began to grow and soon the men outnumbered the women. The attendance now runs between 18 and 24.

Barbara D., a member of the group said, "So many meetings end on a powerful, positive note. This is truly a healing meeting."

It Works Group

In early 1995, a young boy on his way to church was shot to death outside a bar near the corner of 13th and Market St. in the Allison Hill District of Harrisburg.

This tragedy deeply disturbed the neighborhood, and resulted over the next few weeks in three calls to Intergroup requesting that an AA meeting be established in the area. The Latinos Unidos Group had formerly met in the vicinity but was no longer in existence.

Contact was made first with Father Alan Wolfe, the priest at St. Francis of Assisi Church. Flyers went out, and the first meeting was held April 17, 1995, with seven people attending.

At a business meeting June 5, the group agreed on an amount of rent to be paid to the church, decided to register the group with GSO, and selected the name "It Works."

A second meeting was started Thursday evenings at Martin Luther King Baptist Church on June 15, but it did not attract any regular attendees and was discontinued within a couple of months.

No progress was made toward establishing a meeting at Central Allison Hill Community Center, the third agency to contact Intergroup for help in forming an AA group.

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ing number of visitors each week. Meeting directly across from the Catholic Workers' House, it has served to introduce new residents in that facility (which serves recovering men and former convicts) to the AA program, as well as women who live in a nearby halfway house, Evergreen.

Weekly attendance ranges from four to 18.

During the years when this group was getting started, the regulars decided that if only one or two of them showed up for a meeting, they would visit for a while and then read from the Big Book rather than just closing up and going home.

In the four and one-half years of the group's existence, they have read only the "Foreword" and "The Doctor's Opinion."

The group holds an *open discussion, non-smoking* meeting on Mondays at 7:30 p.m. at St. Francis.

1997

Mount Holly Springs

Committed AA's will go to any lengths to hold a meeting.

On a balmy evening in 1999, Tom A. was on his way to open the Mount Holly Springs Group meeting room at Evangelical Lutheran Church.

He spotted another member, Wilma, headed the other way. Tom just assumed the meeting must have been canceled, so he went home.

Actually, the meeting had been forced out of the church by Vacation Bible School, so Wilma was on a mission to get some chairs from home so the group could meet in the church parking lot. The meeting did go on—without Tom.

"It isn't always that involved getting people to a meeting," said Tom, "but it has been a struggle. We could use a lot of support."

The group—formed to serve Mounty Holly, Gardners, and other towns in the area—held its first meeting January 21 1997 with four people, and continues to hold a *closed discussion, non-smoking* meeting on Mondays at 6:30 p.m. at the church, 602 McLand Ave. in Mount Holly Springs with four-five members in attendance.

Language of the Heart Group

The Language of the Heart Group started October 5, 1998, in response to a request by a minister at the Second Presbyterian Church at 530 Garland Drive, Carlisle.

The clergyman had a relative in recovery and he knew the value of AA, so he wanted to reach out to the community with the message of hope.

At the same time, several AA members in Carlisle had expressed an interest in a Saturday morning meeting in Carlisle, so the timing was right.

The founders included Ricky Z., Bill W., and a student at Dickinson. It has remained small, and that, says Bill W., is one of its strong points.

"We meet in a very comfortable and intimate setting in the church library, and many members have expressed the enjoyment of being able to share in the smaller meeting format—which usually draws about six members, but on occasion has reached 16," said Bill W.

The meetings—which are based on discussion of Bill W.'s "Grapevine" writings in the book *Language of the Heart*—are *open, approved literature, non-smoking* meetings at 10 a.m. Saturdays. Take Exit 14 (Walnut Bottom Rd.) off I-81; entrance is to the left of the round sanctuary.

In addition to its regular meetings, the group also has hosted Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day alcohons.

Among the Missing

Five groups listed on the 1999 meeting schedule remain unaccounted for.

We were informed by an ex-member that **Simple Acceptance Group**, Duncannon, no longer meets.

In the other four cases, phone calls and mailed questionnaires gained no response, and personal visits to sites on the appointed meeting dates detected only locked and darkened doors at **Live Free or Die Group**, 21st and Derry Sts., Harrisburg; **SOS Group**, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, 221 N. Front St., Harrisburg; **Happy Hour Group**, same address; and **Back to Reality Group**, 2012 N. 4th St., Harrisburg.

Basic Solutions

The Basic Solutions Group started February 27, 1998 in the nursery of St. Theresa's Catholic Church at 1300 Bridge St., New Cumberland.

"We saw the need for a meeting that really got to the basic principles of AA," said Fran N., the founder. The group holds a *closed discussion, non-smoking* meeting Fridays at 7 p.m.

"We're small—about eight to ten on average—but the sharing at our meetings is the most sincere that I've experienced anywhere in the program," Fran said.

Living Sober Group

The Living Sober Group started in July 1998 in the building adjacent to St. Andrew in the Valley Episcopal Church, at 4260 Linglestown Rd.

"My husband, Peter, and I found that there were no AA meetings in that area, and we knew there were plenty of people who could use one. That's the how and why of our beginning," said Louise M., one of the founders. "Actually, Peter was the real founder."

The group started out discussing readings from the book *Living Sober*—thus the group's name.

"But that's a relatively little book, and when we ran out of readings the group started to peter out," she said.

So they changed it to a *Big Book non-smoking* meeting—6:30 p.m. Saturdays—and now it draws anywhere from nine to 20 people.

Bridge Street Group

A huge void was created when the 21st Street Group and Holy Spirit Hospital agreed amicably to stop holding AA meetings at the Hospital in 1997.

In an attempt to fill that void, the 21st St. Group became the Bridge Street Group and began meeting February 7, 1998, at Trinity United Methodist Church, 421 Bridge Street, in New Cumberland.

The group now holds a *closed discussion* meeting Thursdays at 8 p.m. and an *open speakers* meeting Sundays at 8 p.m. Both are *non-smoking*.

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A reputation for "carrying the message" and actively participating in area AA projects followed the group to New Cumberland, and membership has been growing steadily to 10-15 on Thursdays and 25-35 on Sundays.

Joy of Living

As young as it is, the Joy of Living Group has already drawn the attention of the AA community in the Harrisburg area—for its laugh-a-minute meetings, for its perseverance, and for a unique outreach to other recovering people.

The early days were touch and go, and after a series of changes in secretaries, the group stopped meeting entirely in August of 1998.

Then on June 23, 1999—at the suggestion of Diane H.—a re-start was spearheaded by Joan W. and Tina H.

"Our membership is now at 16, and the fun part is the humor that is shared at the meetings," said Tina. "When newcomers attend, you can see the puzzled looks on their faces when the laughter erupts."

On December 12, 1999, the group held its first Christmas gift-giving party for the children of recovering alcoholics—an event they have already determined will be annual.

"We have in the area a number of mothers who are early in their recovery and are up against it financially. This was one way we saw to carry the message—by making Christmas a little more merry for the children and by giving other recovering people the opportunity to contribute gifts for the occasion," said the group.

The meetings, *open discussions* on Wednesdays at 6 p.m. at the Fellowship House, feature a drawing of a "Big Book" or "12 & 12" topic. The final Wednesday every three months is devoted to a *speaker* meeting. All meetings are *non-smoking*.



Millersburg Group

When Wilson "Red" Daniel died in September, 1994, the Millersburg Group, which had met in his home since 1976, ceased to exist. As a result, there was no AA in the immediate Millersburg Area until Bob V. started a Big Book meeting at the United Methodist Church, on Union St., Millersburg. That lasted about six months.

Then in August 1998, Brent B. started a *non-smoking open discussion* meeting in the lower level of St. Paul's Lutheran Church at North and Walnut Sts., Millersburg, on Mondays at 7:30 p.m.

"We can use a lot of support," said Brent, "We usually have between five and seven people in attendance, but the number has on occasion fallen to one or two."

Happy Destiny Group

Happy Destiny Group actually started in the early 1990s and the Walnut Bottom Group traces its roots back to 1985.

But the two became one in the late autumn of 1998. Here's how it happened.

Back in the early 1990s, the Happy Destiny group had been meeting Friday nights in the Stevens Center in Carlisle. At the same time, the Walnut Bottom Group had been meeting Wednesdays and Thursdays in the same building.

Attendance was slipping at both the WB meetings, while it was flourishing at the Happy Destiny meeting. Eventually, the three meetings merged into one group, the name of which—Happy Destiny—was decided by group conscience.

So we lost a colorful name, but gained a stronger group.

For the record, the Walnut Bottom Group was started by Bob R. and a group of others—some of which were carpenters. Since Walnut Bottom Rd. was the old site of the Stevens Center and since walnut was a hardwood and many of the members had experienced "hard bottoms," they settled on that rather descriptive name.

Today, Happy Destiny meets Wednesdays at 7 p.m. for a *closed discussion*; Thursdays at 7 p.m. for a *closed Big Book and steps and traditions* meeting; and Fridays at 7:30 p.m. for an *open discussion*. The first Friday of the month is reserved for an *open "Living Sober"* meeting. All are *non-smoking*. **The Stevens Center is now at 33 State Rd., off Rte 34S.**

Chapter 9 Group: In April 1998, a Chapter 9 group began *open discussion* meetings on the first and third Sundays of the month at 7:30 p.m. in Grace United Methodist Church, W. Pomfert Street, Carlisle.

Those present at the first meeting committed to keep the meeting going for one year—and they did. The group never really got off the ground, but seeds were planted. It was disbanded in April, 1999.

1999 Fisherville Group

When the Upper Dauphin Group stopped meeting in 1993 there was virtually no place for recovering alcoholics to go for a meeting between Harrisburg and Lykens.

Then in August, 1999, Kurt S. arranged to reopen the meetings at Messiah Church in Fisherville, along with some strong help from Cathy S.

The group was renamed the Fisherville Group to more closely pinpoint its location.

"We've been playing it by ear the best we can," said Cathy S.

"We could use support from other groups to help us and guide us as we take our first steps."

Open Big Book meetings are held at 7 p.m. Tuesdays.

Go to Halifax, stay on Route 225 about four miles to Fisherville. Make a right turn (there's only one) and go one block to the church. The meeting is in the basement.

West Shore gets new intergroup

As this history was being assembled, a majority of the AA groups participating in the Carlisle Area Service Board voted to form a new intergroup, Cumberland Valley Intergroup, and invited all interested groups west of the Susquehanna River to join.

Some have said they will remain with Harrisburg Area Intergroup; some will be a part of both; some will belong only to Cumberland Valley Intergroup.

Harrisburg Area Intergroup has pledged its cooperation to the new organization.

Out of the Dark Group

When the Stay Alive Group voted to continue to permit smoking at its Sunday morning meetings in Falview, the non-smokers decided to form a new group.

They moved to Wormleysburg Boro Hall, took on the name Out of the Dark (from "As Bill Sees It"), and held their first meeting January 10, 1999.

LeeAnn C. and Eileen S. had been talking for some time about making the move but were unsuccessful in finding a meeting place, so they put the idea on the shelf.

"But our Higher Power kept reminding us of the need and a place was found," said LeeAnn.

The group's public relations policy is based, of course, on attraction rather than promotion, but some of that attraction may be the aroma of donuts and brewed coffee that are served at every meeting.

It must work, because the 18 people attending the first meeting grew to 32 in less than a year.

Meetings—*closed discussion, non-smoking*—are held Sundays at 9 a.m.

Never Too Young Group

Our public relations policy may be attraction rather than promotion, but a catchy name might help, too.

Dwain C. saw no young people's meetings in the area, so he started one in Perdix in the summer of 1999.

The group holds an *open discussion, non-smoking* meeting on Wednesdays at 8 p.m. at the Perdix Fire House on Rtes. 11 & 15 northwest of Marysville.

And they are attracting some young people.

"Most of us are adults," said Dwain, "But we have had a 14-year-old, a couple of 15-year-olds and a 17-year-old."

Average attendance is 8-12 per meeting.



Rule 62 Group

If you like serious AA mixed with a few belly laughs, drop in for a visit to the Rule 62 Group.

The group holds a *non-smoking, closed discussion* meeting Sundays at 7:30 p.m. at St. Mark's Evangelical Church, 4200 Londonderry Rd., Room 209.

The name of the group offers a clue to its personality—and helps explain its meeting format.

"Rule 62" comes from page 149 of the Twelve & Twelve that says "Don't take yourself too damn seriously."

The founders, Carol M. and Warren M., were looking for a meeting that was targeted toward the positive aspects of recovery.

"In other words, we got tired of going to meetings that were nothing but dumping with no recovery talk on how the principles of the program could be applied to help resolve almost any problem," said Carol.

She used to attend a meeting in Clarion, Pennsylvania, where members, after sharing, would pass a red ball to the next member they wanted to hear from.

That "pass the red ball" format was changed to a "pass the rubber chicken" format at the Rule 62 meetings, which began February 21, 1999.

"In line with our name, we figured it would be pretty hard for anyone to take themselves too seriously if they were sitting there holding a rubber chicken," Carol said.

It worked.

According to the members, the meeting is always upbeat and full of laughter, and it draws between 15 and 20 members and has a newcomer at just about every meeting.



Men's Spiritual Retreat

In October, 1998, Moses B. began to probe AA members to see if there was interest in a men's spiritual retreat, and he gained an immediate and positive response.

A committee—consisting of Moses B., Big Jim B., Ed L., Harry P., "Buckskin" Bob S. and Randy M.—met monthly from November until final plans were formulated and a registration flyer was produced.

As a result of their work, the first men's AA spiritual retreat was held Aug. 27-29 at the Precious Blood Spiritual Center in Columbia, Pa.

Retreat leaders were Father Ed. L. and Leo B.

Ed. L., of Mid City, served as moderator for the 24 members who re-examined and strengthened their progress in working the 11th Step.

The interest in the retreat was such that a committee immediately began planning for a year 2000 encore, this one August 18-20 and focusing on the 4th Step.



State Hospital, Holy Spirit

With two exceptions, we have not included alcoholism treatment centers in this edition of A History of AA in the Harrisburg Area, even though we have traditionally enjoyed a close friendship with many of those facilities.

One exception to the exclusion is Holy Spirit Hospital, which is mentioned extensively in the history of the 21st Street Group and other groups that have had a 12th Step relationship with the Hospital.

Another exception is Harrisburg State Hospital where the first rehabilitation center in the area was opened by Dr. Dean Olwiler and Administrator Herbert Johnson in 1969. The facility served clients with alcoholism and a history of mental illness.

The AA community supported this endeavor by providing speakers and chairpersons at hospital meetings. The facility closed its doors in 1974, but local AA members continue to carry the message to patients at the hospital.

Fellowship House

Perhaps nothing in the Harrisburg area mirrors local AA history more than the Fellowship House at 1251 S. 19th Street in Harrisburg.

For nearly half a century it has held out a welcome hand to thousands of desperate alcoholics who might never have found a sober spiritual life had the Fellowship House not been here.



And its history mirrors the recovery of many individual AAs—marked by financial hard times, struggles, boundless joy—all the usual landmarks on the road of happy destiny.

It all started in 1950 when recovering alcoholics in the Harrisburg area pledged to build a house on land

that was available for purchase at 1251 S. 19th St.

It would be another 30-plus years before it was called the Fellowship House.

This house was to be conceived as a place to hold meetings, conduct sponsor-sponsee meetings, make private consultation possible and provide an environment of recovery for the alcoholic community.

Alanon Association Inc. is born

Under the proposal, a nonprofit corporation would own the building since it is a violation of AA traditions for any AA group to own property.

In 1951, a majority of members of the **Harrisburg Group**, commonly known as the **2nd and Chestnut Street Group (now Mid City)** took the first steps toward making the new building a reality by forming Alanon Association, Inc. and filing for its articles of incorporation.

The initial corporate address was 201 Chestnut St. Board members included Leo S., Foster K., Steven S., C.B., and C.G. This non-profit corporation had personal property of \$3,000 to initiate its corporate functions.

Its stated purpose was "to encourage sobriety amongst its members by inculcating the principles and practices of Alcoholics Anonymous; to render relief and assistance to all alcoholics as may be judicious and necessary; to maintain and conduct a club hour to provide refreshments,

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entertainment, and social and physical diversions for its members; and to promote their moral, mental, and physical improvement."

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania approved the articles of incorporation that same year, and in 1952 Alanon Association Inc. secured a \$10,000 loan to finance construction at 1251 S. 19th St.

The first meeting was held before the building was even finished—with a pair of sawhorses and a sheet of plywood serving as a table amidst all the rubble of construction.

The group, now referred to by old-timers as the **19th Street Clubhouse**, continued to use the new building but could not be registered with the GSO.

Growing pains already

In 1955, to meet the needs of a growing AA community, Alanon Association, Inc., added a new meeting room with a seating capacity of 75 to the original building.

In 1958, the 19th Street Group was formed to accommodate the original Harrisburg Group members who chose to meet at the new clubhouse and wanted a registered group to which they could belong.

The group held open meetings on Wednesdays and Fridays and from the beginning through 1979, these were the largest meetings in the Harrisburg area.

19th Street Group was responsible for maintaining the property—far more expensive than the upkeep at 2nd & Chestnut had been. It was time for belt-tightening.

During the winter, meetings were held in the coffee room (now the "Half Measures" room) to save fuel. It was not unusual to pass the hat for additional funds when expenses were higher than contributions. Some objected, but the bills had to be paid.

And no more of this business of tossing an occasional dime in the coffee fund; a volunteer was now stationed at the pot to make sure every cup was paid for.

"Big Book" and "12 & 12" raffles were held at each Friday speakers meeting. Poker games were conducted by some members but with little financial aid to the group.

Meeting nights were expanded to include Monday, Thursday, and Saturday, and membership at the clubhouse continued to grow until 1979.

Then, as many new groups formed in the area, clubhouse attendance and contributions began to decline.

When the 19th Street Group could no longer meet its financial obligations, it considered moving its meetings to another location and leaving the responsibility for operating the clubhouse to Alanon Association Inc.

Then, in 1982, cooperation between the clubhouse and the 19th Street Group resulted in a variety of registered and non-registered meetings and the membership again began to grow.

Many members attending meetings at the clubhouse wanted to belong to a registered group and made 19th Street Group their home group. Other members chose to attend non-registered meetings or both.

A new name—by accident!

While most of us now refer to 1251 S. 19th St. as the "Fellowship House," that name is relatively new and, in fact, quite accidental.

When times got really tough in 1982, Ed H. spoke to members of the 19th Street Group about the possibility of using the building as an open house for recovering people. The group accepted the proposal under the condition that ways and means to implement it could be developed.

Ed H. repeated his proposal to Harrisburg Area Intergroup in June, 1982, and a committee—consisting of Ed H., Leigh L., Jethro W., Pete H., and Lucy H. developed a plan to keep the house opened on a daily basis. Intergroup approved.

It was at one of the committee's meetings that Geiri H., the acting secretary, referred to the building as "Fellowship House" in the minutes of the proceedings. The committee thought the name appropriate and directed Geiri to record fellowship House as the official designation of the facility.

Fellowship House was officially opened November 15, 1982—on a daily basis, from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.—and staffed by volunteers from various groups.

Fellowship House reflects AA growth

An instant picture of the growth of AA in the Harrisburg area can be seen in the fact that as late as 1982, there were only six meetings per week in the Fellowship House. In 1999, that number had soared to 37 per week with an estimated weekly attendance in excess of 1,000 recovering people.

Many newcomers are perplexed when they hear at the beginning of a daytime meeting: "This is not a registered meeting." "Why?" they ask.

The answer can be found in the fact that all day meetings are conducted under the aegis of the Fellowship House and contributions from those meetings are used to finance maintenance and operation of the building.

As the number of meetings increased and attendance enjoyed continuous growth, some members saw the need for still further improvements and expansion, and in July, 1989, Alanon Inc. put out a call for suggestions concerning what an expansion should consist of.

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A controversy of no small proportions erupted when Alanon Inc. stated its intent to go outside AA for financial help in carrying out the expansion—the estimated cost of which was \$242,000

A giant facelift

The project included enlargement of the meeting area with ability to create separate areas for smoking and non-smoking, a heating, ventilating and air-conditioning system, expansion and upgrade of electrical system, enlargement and improvement of kitchen, addition of two small conference rooms. Addition of storage space and upgrade of the parking area, and provision for handicapped access.

The Fellowship House Committee—six members present—voted 3-2, with one abstention, to go ahead.

The total Fellowship House Committee included Harry M. (chair), Kris, Mary J., Jim M., Don K., Betty R., Fred B., Jim S., and Ed H.

But where would the meetings go while the construction was underway?

Harry toured the Armory Building next door and reported that it would serve Fellowship House's purposes, so arrangements were made to move, a portion was decked out as a meeting room, and the rest of the building was secured.

So the Fellowship House was closed in September, 1992; the committee took over the Armory; and the construction people went to work.

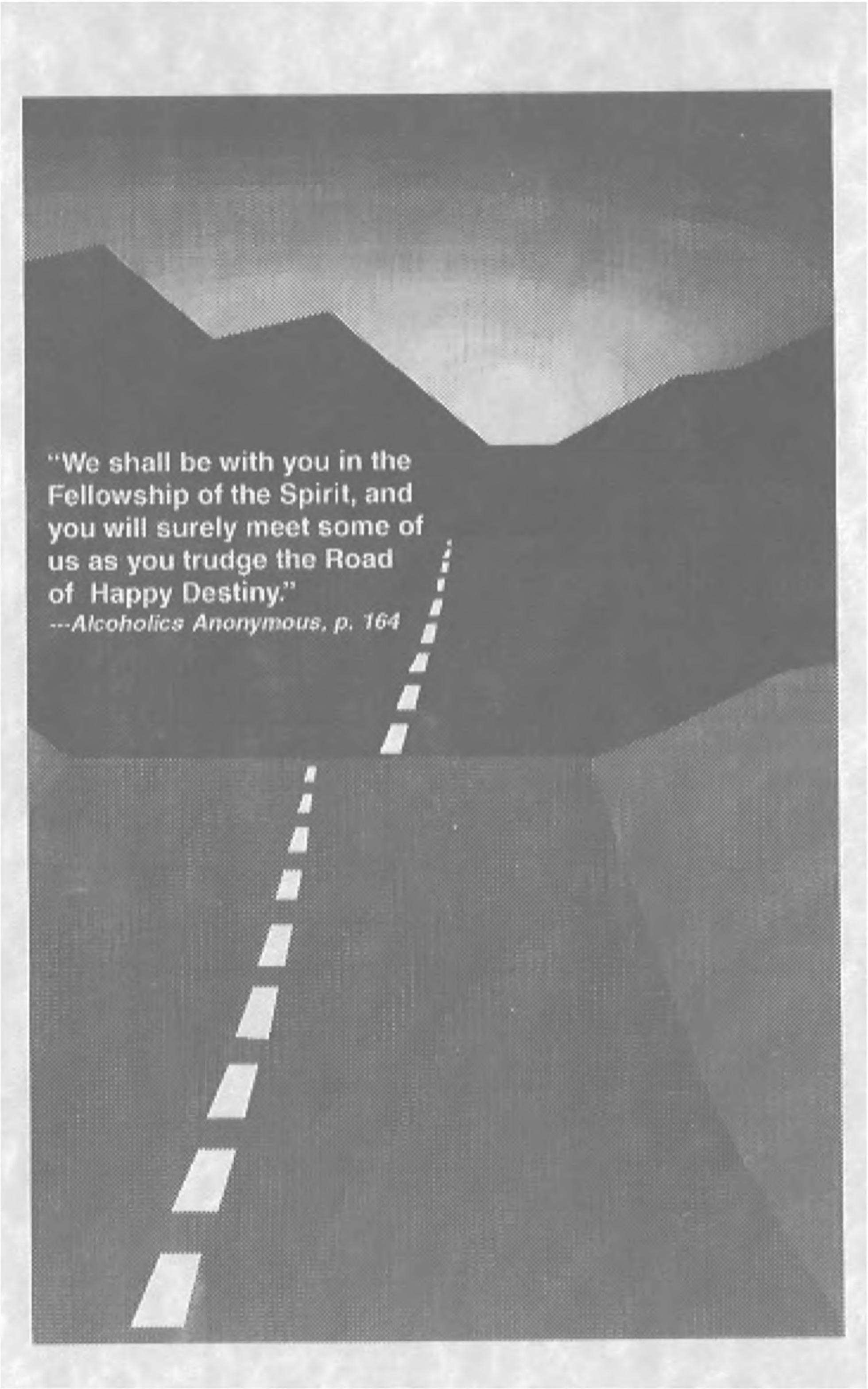
It was just a few months later, on April 17, 1993, that meetings moved back into the Fellowship House—which was cluttered with dust and debris but was still a much improved "home sweet home."

A grand opening was held from May 27-30 marking completion of a job which anyone in his right mind might have considered impossible less than a year earlier.

The real history of the Fellowship House lies in the anonymity of hundreds (thousands?) of recovering alcoholics who took seriously our declaration of responsibility:

"I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that, I am responsible."

To them—those who led the way and those who continue to shoulder the load—we owe a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid.



"We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny."

--*Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 164*