

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

We are grateful for the participation of Margaret S., Dick R., Eugene R., Bill B., Bill W., Jack B., and the late Jimmie C., as well as GSO headquarters and the support of the Harrisburg Intergroup in the development of this historical account. Special thanks to the Alanon Association of Harrisburg for their release of pertinent information for this report.

PREFACE

We suggest that future revisions or additions to this report should always be written in a simple and honest manner to reflect the growth of AA in the Harrisburg area. These changes should also recognize and include shared feelings from the alcoholic community. This was, in part, the objectives of this initial report. Pieces of this history mention items that are not part of Alcoholics Anonymous. They are included as matters of interest to the recovering community.

Service Committee - Research Project

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ESSENCE OF GROWTH

"The essence of growth is a willingness to change for the better and then an unremitting willingness to shoulder whatever responsibility this entails. Let us never fear needed change. Certainly we have to discriminate between changes for the worse and changes for the better. But once a need becomes clearly apparent in an individual, in a group, or AA as a whole, it has long since been found out that we cannot stand still and look the other way."

Excerpt: "As Bill Sees It."

FORWARD

It is not uncommon to hear expressions of gratitude for being sober a day at a time, day or evening in the greater Harrisburg area. This is possible because there are at least 25 AA groups available to serve the recovering alcoholic. These groups may have Closed, Open or Speaker meetings, as well as Big Book, Step, or various Institutional meetings. There is also a blend of social activities provided by the Fellowship House which is open many hours each day, seven days per week for recovering alcoholics. Additionally, the Harrisburg Area Intergroup, which consists of elected or appointed representatives from all local AA Groups, provides the communication network and other related functions in carrying the message of AA.

AA meetings today are generally held in churches, hospitals, and other established community landmark facilities. The general attitude and atmosphere in and around Harrisburg is supportive to the recovering alcoholic. In reflection, and based upon the results of our study, the present picture of AA in the Harrisburg area is in dramatic contrast to that of the past. Harrisburg celebrated its 125th birthday during 1985. The first recorded AA meeting was established in this city on June 1, 1941. It was an unpretentious beginning in that it was not readily received by either alcoholics or non-alcoholics. In 1941, the Saturday Evening Post printed an article written by Jack Alexander which described the disease of alcoholism. The message received national attention. In response to this daring and informative reporting, 1100 inquiries were received at the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, NYC, NY. According to the GSO, "there is no record of an [immediate] inquiry from the Harrisburg area in response to this 'Post' article."

The purpose of this brochure is to present our findings of AA in Harrisburg as to its origin and its growth.... what it was like....what happened....and what legacies of the past remain with us today. the methodology used to obtain information was as follows: a) reviewed available records such as files, newspaper articles, and Group files; b) reviewed GSO archives; and c) personal interviews with consenting AA members who have had 20 or more years of sobriety.

Some of the old records were found to be informative and very useful and should be preserved in a permanent display file. The GSO information received provided us with key dates of AA meetings, their locations, group secretaries, and membership status. The personal interviews conducted provided much insight and depth

into group functions at that time, as well as membership interaction. We have attempted to assemble much of the material and resources obtained in this study so as to present an honest, simplistic, and chronological report suited to, and primarily for, recovering alcoholics. We realize that some gaps in knowledge may exist; however, continued interest and studies should resolve this matter. We believe that this is the first written report designed to study the origin and growth of AA in our area. We are enthusiastic and grateful to have been given this opportunity to review, reflect, and to become aware of our personal growth as well as the growth of so many others.

We received, analyzed, and compiled large amounts of data, both written and verbal, during this study. This information was condensed and the events were then reported in chronological order.

THE HISTORY OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

IN THE HARRISBURG AREA

Early 1940: On or about August 1940, Roger B., a native of Philadelphia, who traveled often to Harrisburg, tried to carry the AA message as well as seek assistance for his 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 GSO of such an action in Harrisburg.

March 3, 1941: Roger B. was transferred by his company to Harrisburg after which he became a resident. He wrote to GSO and requested information along with their support to start an AA group in Harrisburg. GSO was elated and promptly responded since this was the first inquiry from Harrisburg since the famous Post article was written and had drawn 1100 responses from other towns and cities across the country.

June 18, 1941: Roger B. became the initiator of AA in the Harrisburg area. Along with the help of five other recovering alcoholics, he started a meeting at his sister's home on Lewis Street, north Harrisburg. Through his 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 Harrisburg Hospital had begun to call Roger B. to assist suffering alcoholics through Twelve Step work.

August 16, 1941: The Meeting, having grown to nine (9) members, shifted from Roger's sister's house to 4th and Market Street, 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's Cafe's dining room. Secretaries for this new group included Tony S. and Ralph W.

March 12, 1942: Roger reported to GSO that the Thursday meeting at the Hotel New Governor were still going strong with ten (10) members attending.

During 1943: The Mid City Group, later known as "The No Bullshit Group," formed. It was the only AA group between Philadelphia and Pittsburg. It was located on the site which is now the Harris Savings and Loan building on North 2nd Street. There were initially eight (8) members. Mid City Group, at unknown times, moved to a place on Fifth and Market Streets, and then to Chestnut Street. It occupied its present site, 122 Chestnut Street, after the Agnes flood of 1972. This information was volunteered by John B., and Mert, two of the oldest members of this group.

NOTE: During the period of 1942 through 1947, there was no recorded Group activities. We assume that this lack of records was due to the effects of World War II.

August 1947: The Group, which apparently had continued to meet in the Hotel New Governor during this no-record period, had relocated to 2nd and Chestnut Streets, downtown Harrisburg. It was now fifty (50) members strong! The group became known as the Harrisburg Group. Records also show that another group had begun at 1822 Green Street.

August 1950: The Harrisburg Group, one hundred (100) members strong, commemorated its "10th Anniversary" by holding an open public meeting at the State Forum. For this anniversary, the Group invited and coordinated the activities with the Pennsylvania Department of Health, 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 estimated U.S. membership in AA at this time was 90,000.

February 28, 1951: The Alanon Association of Harrisburg filed for its "Article of Incorporation." Its initial address was 201 Chestnut Street. Officers 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 function. The purpose of the Alanon Association 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, entertainment, and social and physical diversions for its members; and to promote their moral, mental, and physical improvement."

April 9, 1951: State of Pennsylvania approved Article of Incorporation for the Alanon Association.

September 1952: Alanon Association secured a \$10,000 loan to be used for the building construction at 19th Street. The original loan papers and deed for the building are kept by the Alanon Trustees.

During 1953: On its own power the spirit of AA continued to expand and the following groups were noted in existence this year:

Hill Group: 520 Naudin Street, Secretary - Herbert S., 7 members.

Mid City Group: Market Street, Secretary - John F., 12 members.

During 1955: Apparently, in an effort to meet the needs of the rapid creation of groups and the protection of anonymity, recovering alcoholics in the Harrisburg area pledged to build a 'house' at 1251 S. 19th Street. This 'house' would be conceived as a place to hold meetings, for sponsorship and consultation, and to provide an environment of recovery for the alcoholic community. Under this proposal, Alanon Association would become the owners. Alcoholics as well as non-alcoholics contributed their talents, time, and money to complete the project.

December 1957: A group began to meet in Wally's House, Ebenezzer, Pa. - 12 people in attendance. This was the beginning of the Hershey Group.

1958: During this year important events occurred such as: Camp Hill established its first group - Friday Night Discussion, Secretary - Mable M.

The group at 1251 S. 19th Street was formally organized with 30 members and was known as the 19th Street Group.

William H. was holding a regular meeting at his home on Walnut Street, Harrisburg.

During 1959: Apparently the calls for "help" from alcoholics increased to the point where it was realized that a telephone, manned by volunteers, was necessary. Thus, 19th Street, with its modern facilities, fulfilled the need for the area's first telephone AA answering service.

Dick K. started a recovery program located on Penn Street, Harrisburg.

Alcoholic Rehabilitation Centers were established in Wernersville, Mayview, and in Philadelphia.

During 1960: The West Shore Group was founded. Meetings were being held at the Trinity Lutheran Church, Camp Hill. Secretaries were Mable M. and Herbert S.

The Mid City Group was holding three (3) meetings per week with 15 members attending.

Out of town groups began to visit Harrisburg groups. They came from York and Lebanon to share their experience, strength, and hope with our local people.

During 1962: Central Pennsylvania Intergroup Service Committee was established by Joseph C.

The 19th Street Group continued to function and expanded to four (4) meetings per week with 30 members attending.

During 1963: Eugene R. began a meeting in Carlisle with two (2) other recovering alcoholics. The Carlisle Group grew to 30 members who met on Tuesdays in the Church of the Brethren on Walnut Street, Carlisle. Eugene's wife founded the Carlisle Alanon Group at this time.

1968: A group known as the Bailey Street Group began holding Sunday meetings. The Secretary was William R.; there were ten (10) members.

By the late 1960's the disease of alcoholism had become recognized by governmental agencies. The Pennsylvania Department of Health, with federal government assistance, began to concentrate on drug and alcohol educational programs. At this point in time Charlie Detrich was recognized for his success in starting "Synanon" in California. New York City's "Phoenix House" was an offshoot of this program.

1971: A group called the New Chance Study Group was established in Camp Hill with Robert S. as Secretary.

The Hershey Group began meetings at Hershey Medical Center with approximately 75 members.

1972: In this year the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and the National Council of Drug Abuse were established to educate and provide counsel. There were, however, still no rehabilitation centers in the Harrisburg area. Pennsylvania Senator Hughes became interested and lobbied for additional funds to be appropriated for recovery programs. The Governor's Council then offered \$100,000 for the establishment of a recovery center. Margaret S., Joe B., Jerry B., and Guy (?), formed a committee to investigate and develop guidelines for a rehabilitation center. As a result, Alcoholic Services Incorporated (ASI) was born. Its first manager was Rick E. who had managed rehab centers in Maryland and had agreed to pilot Harrisburg's first center. During this period Gaudenzia was started; its primary emphasis being on drug abuse. This was another giant step in the efforts to help addicted persons.

1973: A new group formed in Steelton; the Secretary was Ruth L.

1975: Groups formed this year were:

Brothers and Sisters Group; meetings Sunday and Thursday; Secretary - Willie J.; 25 members.

Lakeside Desire Group; meetings Sunday and Thursday; Secretary - Richard B.; 10 members.

21st Street Group; Secretary - Elizabeth S.; 22 members.

During 1976: New Life Group began Wednesday night meetings; Secretary - Betti S.

September 1978: Dillsburg Group was started.

August 1982: Mechanicsburg Group started. At the first meeting, the following members were present: Randy M., Matt M., Jim B., John S., and Charlie K.

There were 5-6 original members. Membership now stands at 20.

NOTE: The Committee reviewed and considered, for inclusion in this report, all the information that we had received from the various groups. Some information did not arrive in time to be processed prior to this first printing. The Committee recommends to Intergroup that any such information omitted here be given priority for inclusion in future additions or revisions of this History of AA in the Harrisburg Area.

June 30, 1986: The following AA groups were in existence:

19th Street Group (Harrisburg) - Secretaries, Lee L. and Richard P.; 30 members.

Lakeside Desire Group (Harrisburg) - Secretary, Francis B.; 10 members.

Mid City Group (Harrisburg) - Secretary, John B.; 20 members.

21st Street Group (Camp Hill) - Secretary, John B.; 20 members.

West Shore Area Group (Camp Hill) - Secretary, Karl S.; 40 members.

Dillsburg Group - Secretary, Steve S.; 15 members.

Carlisle Group - 30 members.

Mechanicsburg Serenity Group - 20 members.

Hershey Group - 30 members.

Chapter Five Group (Hummelstown)

Concordia Group (Hummelstown)

Winners Circle Group (Grantville)

Progress Group (Harrisburg) - 25 members.

Walnut Bottom Group (Carlisle) - 25 members.

Women's Serenity Group (Camp Hill) - 25 members

Stay Alive Group (Fairview Township) - 60 members

Big Book Group (Mechanicsburg)

Lamda Group (Harrisburg)

Wellsville Group - 7 members

Pine Street Group (Harrisburg)

First Things First Group (Hershey)

Upper Dauphin Group

THE ALANON GROUPS:

Carlisle Group
Hershey Medical Center Group
New Beginnings Group (Hummelstown)
Stepping Stones Group (Mechanicsburg)
West Shore Group (Camp Hill)
Out Reach Group (Camp Hill)

THE ALATEEN GROUPS:

Carlisle Group
Hummelstown Group
West Shore Group (Camp Hill)

I N T E R V I E W S

Jimmy C. "It's Swell to be Well." I came in the AA program on December 4, 1950, and I'll have 32 years total sobriety. I came from skid row. My first meeting was at 2nd & Chestnut Street, Harrisburg Group. There was no literature, no hospitals, no rehabs, no hotline. The 19th Street Group used to keep attendance records of its AA members. If a member didn't show for a meeting, it would be noted and other AA members would make contact. Also, members used to take up collections for placing alcoholics in hotels or the Bethesda Mission. Some of the old-timers remembered were George A., Freddi D., Bud N., Stacy, and Bill H. Jimmy made the trip to York sometimes to attend AA meetings. The only AA literature that became available was from GSO in New York.

Margaret S. remembers the Friday night meetings at Lancaster where 150 recovering alcoholics shared their experience, strength, and hope. John P. was important to the Lancaster meetings and area. Margaret recalls Irene J. (from Scranton) who would keep an alcoholic from drinking by actually sitting on them. Jane, Fran, Laura, and Margaret were the first women attending meetings at 19th Street. She remembers that Danville Prison was the only place with an alcoholic recovery program. The 19th Street members supported that meeting.

Dick R.first meeting attended was at 19th Street. He was 12th stepped by a friend's wife that was in the program. After several months, Dick went back out and realized that he couldn't handle alcohol. He "got more out of the program by helping other alcoholics." Dick also liked the meetings 'before and after' the meeting. At that time, AA activities included New Years Eve parties, trips to Philadelphia....Marlin Z. kept Mid City together.

Eugene R.lived in the Newark, Ohio area. He entered AA in May of 1952 after a 4-day drunk. Eugene was 28. Another AA member continued to take Eugene to meetings an average of two per week. Group size ranged from 30-50 members. His first two years of sobriety were continued in Ohio before he relocated to Peru, Indiana. Eugene attended meetings for the next five years throughout the midwest. In June of 1959, he moved to Carlisle, Pa. There were no AA meetings in Carlisle. Eugene thought it was too far to travel to attend meetings in Harrisburg. Six months passed without attending meetings, Eugene began drinking. "Two years later, three wrecked cars and five lost jobs, I decided to go back to AA." In 1961, he became a member of the AA Clubhouse in Harrisburg, thanks to Joe C., "who was instrumental in my successful return to sobriety." In the winter of 1963, Eugene and two other recovering alcoholics began a meeting in Carlisle, which grew to 30 members and met regularly on Tuesday nights. His wife was instrumental in the Carlisle Alanon group. Since 1975, Eugene and his wife have been living in Florida, he continues to be active in AA.

Bill B.In 1950, at the age of 26, Bill sought out Dr. Pilgrim for help with his alcoholism. Bill attended his first meeting one April afternoon during this year. He was immediately impressed by the people he met. Some of the people who influenced his recovery included Mary R., Joe and Jimmie C., Leo S., Foster K., Chet H., Earl A., Joe S., Bill H., George S., Dick E., Bill R., Marlin Z., Stacy, Walt M., Jimmie H. (NOTE: Bill mentioned several other AA's).

Although Bill gave his last name to us, he did say that anonymity is still very important to the success of AA.

To assist in future writings or revisions to the Growth of AA in the Harrisburg Area, members may forward information to the Service Committee of the Harrisburg Intergroup, 1251 S. 19th Street, Harrisburg, PA 17104.