

1000

Years of Sobriety



20 People \times 50 Years



William G. Borchert Michael Fitzpatrick
With Forewords by Sandy B. and Howard P.

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William G. Borchert and Michael Fitzpatrick

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Authors' Note

THERE IS AN INSIGHTFUL SANSKRIT PROVERB that proclaims: “Yesterday is but a dream and tomorrow only a vision, but today well lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope.”

What a gift it must be to experience this way of life for more than fifty years, as have those whose stories are contained in this book.

Looking ahead, five decades can seem like an eternity—600 months; 2,600 weeks; 18,250 days; 438,000 hours; or 1,576,800,000 seconds. But looking back, five decades can seem like a series of fleeting moments we may either cherish or disdain.

However, lived well in sobriety, fifty years can produce an abundance of good works, a plenitude of loving friends, the sharing of great spiritual wealth, and the creation of a solid path for others to follow as they tread that road of happy destiny.

It has been an enormous privilege to write this book and the stories of twenty people from around the world who have lived the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous one day at a time for more than fifty years—and are still carrying this great message of recovery to others.

Spending time getting to know these wonderful members of the fellowship has not only been a truly rewarding experience, but an honor as well. Each one of them clearly demonstrates the adage: “Freely you have received, freely give.” Saved from an almost certain alcoholic death more than fifty years ago, they have spent these past five decades or more carrying the message to others—a mission that has undoubtedly touched thousands upon thousands of other alcoholics and their families.

Although their stories were at times sad and tragic, they

turned out to be some of the most inspiring testimonies one could possibly imagine. Now, with the publication of this book, their experiences will continue to bring hope and unconditional love to the world long after their service on this earth is finished. For that we can all be grateful.

It is our wish that you will be inspired by their stories and challenged by their accomplishments.

BILL BORCHERT AND MIKE FITZPATRICK

Foreword by Sandy B.

THIS REMARKABLE COLLECTION of the personal stories of twenty present-day AA “old-timers” could not be more timely or valuable. As the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous reaches its seventy-fifth year, authors Bill Borchert and Mike Fitzpatrick make available to the two million members of AA a treasury of insight into AA’s past fifty years that could not be achieved in any other fashion. Further, since the early sobriety of all these members coincided with the later days of the earliest AA old-timers and founders, including Bill Wilson, this book creates a bridge for us to experience the entire AA story.

I take personal delight in commenting on this rare collection because many of these men and women have become personal friends. Some were heroes of mine in my early sobriety. They are living icons in the particular areas of the country where they presently reside. Sadly, the stories of many other icons have faded with their passing. I know of several whose stories I deeply wish had been reduced to writing. There is something comforting and enduring about the written word. Tapes and CDs of AA talks are stimulating and valuable. But the written story brings a sense of history and permanence with it.

While reading, we can take our time to reflect on and enjoy particular passages. I am sure that, as time passes, we will always be glad that we added this book to our personal collection. It will be available to stimulate and nourish our memories any time we pick it up and settle into our favorite chair with it for an hour or so.

To our newer members, I urge you to assemble your own collection of AA-related books and definitely to include this volume. Until you know and experience the entire AA story, your sense of belonging will be limited and tentative. Gradually, though, you will come to realize that you and your story

are part of AA history. What is history but a collection of stories? As the total AA story comes alive in and through you, you will begin to see yourself as a small but vital part of one of God's greatest miracles and can delight in the realization that this story is a part of you as well.

I would like to thank the authors for enriching my life with this marvelous collection and for their tireless efforts on behalf of the fellowship.

SANDY B.
Tampa, Florida

Foreword by Howard P.

IN THE BOOK *ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS*, author Bill Wilson promised, “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.”

Many of us have already had the privilege of meeting some of the men and women who tell their stories in this wonderful book—who tell what it was like, what happened, and what it is like now after more than fifty years of continued sobriety.

These men and women who have experienced “pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization” and now walk in “the sunlight of the spirit” are still active in the fellowship of AA. They continue to be among us, to speak with us on a one-to-one basis in meetings, on the telephone, and at AA conferences and roundups.

The lives of the twenty alcoholics presented in this book provide solid evidence that the practice of AA’s spiritual principles have worked for them for fifty years or more. And they will tell you, in their own way and in their own words, “If it can work for me, it can work for every one of you.”

I am grateful for the role I have played in helping to bring this book to fruition. I want to join in thanking these twenty sober members of Alcoholics Anonymous with more than a thousand years of sobriety for sharing their lives with us.

HOWARD P.

Gilbert, Arizona

1000 Years of Sobriety

“I wanted to kill myself, but I wasn’t about to walk ten more miles to do it.”

THE STORY OF CLANCY I.



A pleasant voice comes over the intercom and says, “Please keep your seatbelts fastened until the airplane comes to a full and complete stop at the gate and the captain has turned off the fasten seatbelt sign.” I fumble around to make sure I have everything ready to depart the plane. A three-hour flight east is not nearly as comfortable as it used to be.

Once I deplane I’ll meet my host, who will take me to a hotel that will be my home for the weekend. This weekend’s agenda looks very familiar. It begins this evening: dinner at five with several members of the conference committee, AA meeting at eight, and a dance to follow.

In the morning I will be presenting a workshop on sponsorship, followed by lunch. At two they have me scheduled for an AA history talk, then a four o’clock old-timers panel. In the evening there will be a banquet where I am the guest speaker.

On Sunday morning I'll be up at five to catch a direct flight back to LA. Later in the day I will be giving one of my sponsees his twenty-year sobriety birthday cake. This may seem like a busy weekend; however, it has become routine for me.

I spend my weekdays at the "Midnight Mission" on LA's Skid Row, where I've been working since 1974. In the evenings I attend AA meetings around the LA area and attempt to spend time with my family. Today I am very fortunate to be able to enjoy being a husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather.

Over the past fifty-one years I have been grateful to have a very active sober life. My membership in Alcoholics Anonymous has given me opportunities beyond anything I could have ever conceived—to befriend and sponsor some of the wealthiest and most famous men and women in the world, including movie stars, business owners, sports celebrities, and rock stars.

But please don't mistake my association with celebrities as bragging. I'm also friends with and sponsor many people who have drunk up almost everything in their lives and in many cases are homeless. Unfortunately, I have seen people from both groups die tragic alcoholic deaths. Alcoholism does not discriminate, and it shows no favorites.

As you can probably already tell, Alcoholics Anonymous has transformed my life from what it was more than sixty years ago when I first came through the doors of the fellowship at the age of twenty-two.

I was an only child born and raised in the small city of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. I was introduced to God at a very early age in the Norwegian Lutheran Church, which was about as tough as it gets when it comes to religion. I knew with certainty that God was a powerful, punishing figure that dwelled off in the clouds somewhere. He was just waiting for the opportunity to catch me sinning so he could strike me dead. It got to the point that whenever the word "God" was mentioned, I would cower. I learned both fear and guilt at a very early age.

When I was fifteen years old, I told my mother I was going to take a bus to Superior, Wisconsin, to visit my aunt. The truth was that I was going to hitchhike to San Francisco to join the military. As luck would have it, I was picked up by a guy who drove me almost the entire way to California.

My driver, a navy man returning to his ship, told me I wouldn't be able to find any way into the military because I was not yet sixteen. He suggested I go to the Coast Guard office on Market Street and apply for seaman's papers. I went there and lied about being sixteen, but they still needed a parent's signature. I went around the corner, and "my mother" signed the form.

I was issued temporary seaman's papers and referred to the National Maritime Union. World War II was raging, and they were looking for merchant seamen. That very night I was aboard a ship carrying loaded torpedo warheads to the South Pacific. I remember lying in my bunk that night, homesick and knowing I had made a mistake. One of the seamen came in with a bottle of whiskey and passed it around. He looked down at me and said in a gruff voice, "You want a snort, Junior?"

By that time a million thoughts were racing through my head. I had made a promise to my mother and grandmother that I would never drink alcohol. I was a movie buff, and in the movies the good guys never drank; only the bad guys. Of course, the religious people had also convinced me that drinking was a curse. With all those thoughts going through my mind, I knew I didn't want to drink. However, I looked up at him, reached for the bottle, and said in my squeaky, adolescent voice, "You're damn right I do."

I'll never forget that first drink of whiskey. It burned my mouth, my throat, and my stomach as it went down, and on the way back up it burned my stomach, my throat, my mouth, and his shirt. I felt terrible, not because I had gotten sick, but because the other men were laughing at me. It was the most

humiliating and embarrassing moment of my life. It was truly dreadful!

From that day on, I knew where to find a bottle, and I would drink when nobody was around just to see if I could keep it down. I wanted to prove to my shipmates that I was a man. The day finally came when it stayed down.

I relate to the way that many others in AA describe their first drink experience. I, too, felt a warm glow from the inside out. It was a feeling of omnipotence, unlike anything I had ever experienced. In retrospect I would have to say that I took my last drink for exactly the same reason I took my first drink. I drank to feel on the inside how other people looked on the outside.

When I was seventeen, I went into the United States Navy. At the end of the war, as the time neared for my discharge, I took the GED examination. It allowed me to earn my high school diploma so I could enter college at the University of Wisconsin. I married while in college, and we had a couple of children.

By 1949, I was drinking too much to stay out of trouble and was even put in jail briefly on several occasions. I heard about Alcoholics Anonymous and decided to check it out. There were eight men at the meeting I attended, all well over forty. I was still in my early twenties, so I decided I was too young to be an alcoholic and left AA.

My first job after college was as a sportswriter. It didn't pay very well, and with a growing family I continued to look for something better. In time, I got a job writing sales correspondence, which led me to that company's advertising department. I eventually got hired at an advertising agency and traveled around the country writing for them. I became quite the successful young advertising executive. Throughout all that success, my drinking continued to increase, as did my feelings of superiority over everyone else. I can see now that alcohol had become my best friend.

For the next nine years I bounced in and out of AA, with brief periods of sobriety. But even so, I managed to be jailed twenty-nine more times during those years and lost everything a man could lose. Once while I was in jail my infant son died, leaving me with feelings of immense guilt.

In 1956, I successfully committed suicide in El Paso, Texas, where we were living at the time. I say “successfully” because I had literally died. I sat in the car with the motor running and the garage door closed. By the time my neighbor found me and pulled me out of the garage, my heart had stopped beating. Thank God he was able to resuscitate me.

I was taken to the city “psycho ward,” where I spent the next three weeks. During my mental evaluation the doctors learned that I had had some drinking problems. They talked with both me and my wife about my drinking, then determined that I could not simply be released. Consequently, on October 14, 1956, I was committed to Big Springs State Hospital. The diagnosis was not alcoholism. It was schizoid personality disorder with no prognosis of recovery. It really meant a life sentence with no way out.

After I had been there just two weeks I escaped, not realizing it was an escape-proof facility. However, Texas is very flat. I think I could be seen running in my white bathrobe from about fifty miles away, in any direction. Needless to say, I was caught. For the next three months I received electric shock therapy. It wasn’t given to me as a “punishment.” I’m sure they thought I must be really disturbed or I wouldn’t have tried to escape. I can assure you, this treatment slowed me down. I never tried to escape again.

After the course of shock treatments, I didn’t even remember coming to Texas. The last thing I could remember was playing piano for drinks in a San Francisco bar. With determination I decided I was going to get out of that hospital legitimately, and I did. I became a model patient. Even in the “nuthouse” I had a strong streak of perfectionism in me. I

was going to be the best patient they ever had. I became the founder of the *Big Springs Hospital Newspaper* (it had a short life) and was its first editor and publisher. I also directed the Christmas pageant; it was a beautiful thing, if you overlooked the craziness.

While I was in the hospital, I met a guy named Les Ross. He spent a great deal of time talking with me about my problems. He told me that he thought I was an alcoholic. With respect, I explained that I couldn't be. Even though I drank excessively, something more was wrong with me. By then I had convinced myself I was different.

The hospital had just opened an alcoholic ward. Les arranged for me to attend the AA meetings there. I believe it was an experiment to see if a mental patient could respond to AA therapy. Things went along just fine, so I was permitted to go with a group to outside meetings in Midland and Odessa. I was even able to give five-minute talks at those meetings.

After about six months in the hospital, I was released and returned to El Paso, where I still had two AA sponsors. The night before I was to celebrate my first birthday in sobriety, I found myself in Juarez holding a drink and waiting for the clock to hit midnight before I downed it. I knew I wasn't an alcoholic. There was something very sick inside of me, but it wasn't identifiable and it certainly was not alcoholism.

So I decided to control my drinking. It actually worked for a short period of time. I found a job with an advertising firm in Dallas. My pregnant wife, three daughters, and I moved to Dallas, where she gave birth to our fourth girl. It was the summer of 1958. My drinking soon got worse.

I lost my job, got another one, and lost it, too. I came home very drunk on a Friday afternoon to find the house empty. My wife had begun attending a new fellowship called Al-Anon. She didn't just leave and take the kids; she took everything. The house was vacant, with not even a rug left. She left no contact information, and I had no way to get in touch with her.

For the next couple of weeks, I stayed drunk while doing some work for a guy in Wichita Falls. When this writing job was finished, he gave me a hundred dollars and sent me on my way. Another friend gave me his car, wanting me to deliver it in Los Angeles. On the first day I made it as far as El Paso, got drunk, and looked up an old sponsor so I could curse him out.

I managed to get thrown in jail for drunkenness in Juarez later that evening. Once out, I headed for Phoenix. In Phoenix I somehow lost the car with all of my belongings, including my ID. I was locked up in the city “drunk tank” and was so drunk I vomited onto a guy’s bunk before falling asleep on the floor. When the guy realized what I had done, he started kicking me in the face, leaving me bloodied and without my front teeth. Because of my experience with psychiatrists, I immediately knew what was wrong with this man. *He was overreacting.*

The next morning I was released after paying a small fine. There I was in downtown Phoenix, broke and broken and not knowing what to do. I fished a dime out of my pocket and placed a series of collect phone calls to everyone I could think of. Nobody accepted my calls, and once again, I pondered suicide.

I was told there was an AA club up the road, so I walked about fourteen blocks until I found it. I sat in the Arid Club, coming off the alcohol and shaking. I was so sick. I spent a long day at that clubhouse without a drink. I finally prevailed on convincing one of the members to “lend” me twenty dollars for a rehab bed.

As soon as I had the money, I ran to the bus depot, hoping to get to Seattle, but I only made it as far as Los Angeles. I was in such bad shape that I was even evicted from the Midnight Mission, a Skid Row facility. There was a little scuffle and I was literally thrown out. As I was flying through the air, I wanted to tell them, *“Don’t you know who I am? My picture has been on the front page of the New York Times for my*

achievements. I've been on the faculty of a major university, and my ads can currently be found in most major national magazines." (It's hard to say all this while in midair.)

I remember lying on the ground looking up at the two guys who had tossed me out. I shook my fist and said, "I'll be back; you haven't seen the last of me."

Only God knew then that this hopeless, helpless, insane, drunken loser of a man would make his way back there fifteen years later as the managing director, sober and restored as a human being through his grace and the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The morning I was thrown out of the mission, I tried to sell a pint of blood. I was rejected because the iron level in my blood was too low. I needed to do something. It was raining outside, and I was finished. At that point I wished I *was* an alcoholic, but I knew that when I stopped drinking things always got worse. Drinking couldn't be the problem. My emotions were so intense when I wasn't drinking that it just had to be a mental problem.

After walking seventy-one blocks to the AA club in a cold October rain, I tried to look sincere. It didn't take long for the guy at the door to size me up. He said, "All right, you can come in. Now go in the back room and sit there and wait for the meeting. Don't let anyone know I let you in, because I think you're a phony."

I thought, "Okay, I'm in. Now I'll get one of these pukes to be my sponsor and in a few days I'll con him out of enough money to get me back on my way to Seattle." It was Halloween 1958; I had no idea it would be my sobriety date.

The challenge in front of me was not quitting drinking. If drinking was my only problem, all I would need to do was quit and my problem would be solved. I discovered it was much more intricate than that. Alcohol anesthetized the pain that was so prevalent when I was sober. In my mind it had become the solution.

I believe one of the greatest drawbacks for a “slipper” like me is the knowledge attained while bouncing in and out of the program. I knew the AA Big Book. I had read it twice. I could recite the Steps from memory. I even knew most of the phrases and slogans. I had ridiculed all that spiritual bunk and other nonsense from AA people.

There I was, starting all over, knowing I would have to listen to the same things once again. But this time I would have to try to believe them. The only reason I went back was because there was no place else to go. I had tried everything over the past nine years: religion, psychoanalysis, and institutions. AA was undoubtedly the last house on the street for me.

It was terribly difficult in the beginning, because I was so sick. All I could do was go to meetings. I went several times a day and was given the opportunity to live in an abandoned car outside the 6300 Club. I knew I had to try to make it in the program, for I feared it would be my last chance at life.

As I progressed and things began to get better, I still struggled with my relationship with God. I couldn't let go of my attitude and fears regarding religion that I had held since childhood. It was hard for me to see myself returning to that God, and it was the only image of God I knew.

Then one of the guys in AA said, “Kid, you don't need to return to God. You just need to find somebody you can trust.” For a while that was my sponsor, Bob; then it was the group. Slowly, by doing the things I was taught, I awakened to the philosophy of Alcoholics Anonymous. I came to believe in it by following through with everything, even when I didn't understand it or agree with it, even when I thought it was stupid.

I finally developed my own concept of God from the things I respected. The one tangible I could define was intelligence. The auto mechanic who lifted the hood of my car understood how it worked and fixed the problem. I respected him for his intelligence. After months of searching and probing, I was

able to come up with a concept of God that was personal to me, a Higher Power I could pray to.

I remember one day thinking about a television antenna that picked up a signal and created a picture. The picture was carried to everyone equally. Similarly, God sends goodness, serenity, peace, and love to every person. If the television was working properly and fine-tuned, the picture was brilliant. This helped me to see that during times when I was not feeling love, serenity, and peace, it was because I was out of adjustment. The transmitter sending the signal was fine; I just needed to turn the knobs to better tune it in. I had to take part and make those adjustments.

By following the directions of my sponsor and becoming teachable, I would be able to see the picture clearer. I began to get rid of my resentments and fixed the things I needed to fix. I started to mend lost and broken relationships.

Taking this course of action gave me a role and a responsibility in my recovery. My actions led to a better life. Those were “adjustment knobs” for me. This concept became the foundation for my sobriety. Through this impression of God, I was finally able to understand the Twelve Steps of AA.

During my early days of sobriety, progress was slow, sometimes painfully slow. It didn’t come easily for me. When I was six months sober, a friend helped me to get a job doing dishes at a deli on Sunset Boulevard. On my fourth day of work, my boss came to me and said, “We have to let you go. Here’s your check.”

I protested and asked, “How can you do this to me? I’ve lost everything, and I’m trying to get back on my feet. I have been to an AA meeting every night. I’m being honest with everyone and trying to do all the right things. I’m searching to find my kids so I can send them something. I have been doing my best to follow a spiritual program. How can you do this to me?”

He looked up at me and said, “Well, I don’t know about all that stuff. You just don’t wash enough dishes.”

I left the deli planning once again to commit suicide. I decided that this time I would walk to the ocean and drown myself. I walked and walked many miles to where I figured the ocean should be, then finally stopped at a gas station and asked for directions. The guy said, “It’s about ten more miles down Wilshire, kid.” That created a dilemma for me. I wanted to kill myself, but I wasn’t about to walk ten more miles to do it.

I found a pay phone and called Bob B., who was attempting to be my sponsor. He was a great guy and liked to get straight to the point. Perhaps he developed this skill in his career as a motion picture actor and radio personality.

Of course, I began by telling him how unfair things were, and went on and on with my complaints. I whined about how hard it was and how I missed my family. I told him, “I hate living in a car. I don’t get enough to eat. And AA just isn’t working for me.”

He replied rather sternly, saying, “Listen, you punk! Why don’t you write your Fourth Step?”

My response was not very enthusiastic. I mumbled, “In my judgment, I’d be better off dead.”

“If I wanted your damned judgment, I’d come down and stick my head in the car window. Your judgment has you sleeping in a car. Now you need to follow some directions and *get busy!*”

By that time I was so mad I walked back up Wilshire Avenue, found some paper and a pencil, then began writing a Fourth Step inventory. Afterward, nothing seemed to change. I still had to go back and sleep in the abandoned car. I was still hungry, jobless, and missed my kids. There was only one thing I proved by doing the inventory and that was that it didn’t work—I wanted immediate results. It’s interesting that I might have done this Step for the wrong reason at the time (my anger toward Bob). However, as it turned out, the anger was enough of a motivator for me to become willing to take action.

About a month or so later, I again felt like killing myself. That time it was because I realized that if what I was hearing at AA meetings was true, then what I had believed all along was a lie. I couldn't face it. In desperation I did my Fifth Step with Bob. It took a long car ride along the ocean, but I got it all out.

Slowly and sometimes painfully, I began to do the work that taught me how to live a sober life. It was not done by doing the things I agreed with. It was done by doing things that were apparently illogical, nonapplicable, and having nothing to do with my specific problems. The actions I took through the Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous became the tools that led me to freedom and sobriety.

When I was five years sober, I was grateful to get my family back, and we made a home together. We even added a son to our family. Many good things began to happen once I learned this new way of life. The good things have caused me to need AA more than the challenges have. It's a funny thing, but rewards and accolades have added new complications to my life or, if you will, to my sobriety. Positive experiences have always caused me more problems than negative ones. Yet I learned that it is through our difficulties that we have spiritual growth.

Today I feel truly alive. I'm so grateful that I have been restored to a respectable human being. I never knew how to be that because I was so busy comparing how I felt to how you looked. Whenever I do that, I'm the loser. I would really like to tell you how proud I am of my children and grandchildren, but that would take hours! So many wonderful events and people have touched my life during the past fifty-one years. If I had hundreds of pages, I would list them all by name!

Through my journey in life I have seen much advancement in our culture. It's amazing how creative we are as a society. With all of these changes one would think that the AA program would have to change to keep up with the times. Yet AA works today exactly as it did when it first started almost

seventy-five years ago. It is still hope and encouragement from one alcoholic to another.

Medicine, science, and religion have worked to find the answer to the question: “Why do some people become alcoholics?” In the meantime, AA has defined alcoholism in an acceptable way and offered a solution to the problem. Through the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, alcoholics in varying degrees of illness have been able to arrest their illness and live happy, productive lives.

Perhaps it works because the Twelve Steps provide a program of action. The alcoholic moves from a condition of self-absorption—where he can only see himself as a “victim”—to a life of service. The spiritual principles of AA lead the alcoholic to be of service to others. The Twelfth Step states: “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 60).

That is exactly why you will find me traveling to another city next week to carry the message. Between now and then you will find me at my home group or down at the mission. I know as I was taught: I must continue to give away what has been freely given to me. Before I wrap this up, I would like to share a story.

Every five years, Alcoholics Anonymous holds an international convention. I’ve attended all of them except the first two. The very first one was held in Cleveland in 1950. At that convention the Traditions were accepted by the fellowship as a part of AA. Historically speaking, that act has proved to be one of the greatest things to happen to AA.

On that same day another significant event took place. Co-founder Dr. Bob gave what is referred to today as his “farewell message.” He was very sick at the time and knew he would live only a short time longer. The cancer had taken over.

Dr. Bob stood up to the microphone and suggested that we “keep this simple.” He then made several very important

points: “Let’s not louse it all up with Freudian complexes and things that are interesting to the scientific mind, but have very little to do with our actual AA work. Our Twelve Steps, when simmered down to the last, resolve themselves into the words ‘love’ and ‘service.’” He continued, “Let us also remember to guard that erring member—the tongue—and if we must use it, let’s use it with kindness and consideration and tolerance.”

He made a few more brief comments, suggesting that we remember to pat the new man on the back and take him to a meeting or two. He also warned us against complacency. I have enjoyed listening to recordings of Dr. Bob’s words over the years.

In 1970, I was invited to speak at the international convention in Miami. Bill Wilson was scheduled to speak on Friday night, but an announcement was made that he wouldn’t be able to make it. He was too ill. Everyone, including me, was very disappointed.

On the way back to my hotel that night, I said to a guy, “Gee, it’s really too bad we won’t be hearing Bill.”

This man replied, “Clancy, let me tell you something. Before this conference is over, we will hear from Bill W.” This guy was an old-timer from Ohio. I just smiled, knowing he must have missed the announcement.

Saturday came and went and, of course, Bill W. never showed up. He was in the hospital, very close to death. On Sunday morning we were sitting in the auditorium while Dr. Jack Norris was speaking. Someone walked up to the podium and said something to him. He stopped speaking and music started playing. He said, “Folks, we have a special guest who just arrived.”

Bill Wilson was pushed out from behind the curtain in his wheelchair. At the podium, he slowly pulled himself erect. It took almost everything he had, his body was so frail, but he stood there looking out at the sea of faces and gave a short talk. He then returned to the hospital by way of ambulance.

Once I had witnessed this, I understood why the old-timer was so sure Bill W. would speak at the convention. It was Bill's last time to let the membership know how much he loved them.

What remarkable men Bill and Dr. Bob were! Because of their efforts and this God-inspired program of AA, millions of people have found sobriety and a new way of life. The examples set by both of these founders right up to their final days have been an inspiration to me for many years. As I continue to travel around the world sharing my experience, strength, and hope with others, as best I can as a fallible human, I pray my example will help reflect the love and dedication of those who traveled the road before me.

AA is really just one alcoholic talking to another alcoholic. My mission has been, and continues to be, to carry the message to others even when they don't yet quite believe it, knowing that when someone takes the action necessary, the day will come when they too can be *safe, sane, and sober*. It is in giving that we receive, and I have received abundantly for fifty-one years.

*“Booze didn’t bring me happiness,
but it did kill the pain.”*

THE STORY OF BILL D.



When it comes to the Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, count me in as a traditionalist who believes in telling what it used to be like, what happened, and what it’s like now. I’m not much of a pontificator, although I do enjoy talking about all the wonderful blessings of sobriety, which have been rather plentiful in my life. Well, actually, that’s true in the lives of most AAs who live this program to the best of their ability.

Anyway, as an old traditionalist, I believe we need to share our “drunkalogs” so that newcomers especially can identify and realize that they’re not alone, can come to understand that there is a way out no matter how far down they’ve gone, and finally can witness in the person sharing his or her story the tremendous miracle of Alcoholics Anonymous. Each day that I live, I become more and more certain that AA is truly one of God’s greatest miracles.

I was born on October 16, 1931, and raised in East Harlem, which was back then one of the roughest and poorest sections of New York City. It was mainly populated by black people along with a constant influx of Irish, Italian, and Puerto Rican immigrants. It was also the Mafia headquarters at that time, so at a very early age I found myself running errands along Pleasant Avenue for the likes of Three Fingers Brown, Tommy Lucchese, and the Genovese mob.

My parents were newly arrived Irish Catholic immigrants. My mom worked as a maid in hotels while my father was a part-time longshoreman, a pool hustler, and a full-time raging alcoholic. He was always broke, mean, and very abusive to my mother. By the time I was eleven, my older brother, younger sister, and I had lived in nine different run-down tenements. We would come home from school and discover we had just been dispossessed one more time. What was left of our furniture would be out in the street along with the cockroaches. It was kind of rough. We were also in and out of foster care, which was then called the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. I came to hate my father and had a hard time forgiving him when I finally got sober.

When I was around six years old, my mother started sending me to the neighborhood saloon to bring my father home. That's where and how I had my first drink—at the age of six at my father's favorite watering hole. Everyone in the joint would be loaded and would want to have fun with the little kid. One day they filled up a fishbowl with beer, handed it to me, and told me to chug the whole thing. While it may be difficult to believe, I managed to get most of it down before my father carried me home—a staggering drunk with his little drunken son in his arms. So that's how it started and that's how it continued for the next eighteen years.

It was the Depression era, and everybody was hungry and in need of practically everything. I had to fight for whatever I got—and I mean literally fight.

About the Authors

After a twenty-year career in the marketing profession, **MIKE FITZPATRICK** has decided to share his passion for writing by coauthoring his first book with his good friend, William G. Borchert. Over the years Mike has written sales promotional pieces and training manuals for several major corporations. He has traveled extensively throughout the United States and Canada as a guest speaker and sales leader, motivating and inspiring his audiences with both his humor and his inspirational message of hope. His message to sales organizations is “Attitude is everything!”

Several years ago Mike undertook a massive restoration project to preserve and digitize what is debatably the largest audio archive related to the Twelve Step movement ever assembled. The archive contains more than three thousand original reel-to-reel recordings. Many of these recordings are the voices of the men and women who pioneered the Twelve Step movement and were leaders in the field of alcoholism. The results of this undertaking are now being made available online at www.recoveryspeakers.org.

Because of Mike’s interest and research ability he has become one of the leading historians in the field of alcoholism, specializing in the development of the Twelve Step movement. Over the past several years he has worked with authors and movie producers providing material for their work.

Mike lives in Chandler, Arizona, with his wife, Joy, and their three children. He and Joy work together to operate his business as a book broker and marketing consultant. At the same time, Mike looks forward to continuing his writing career as a published author.

Both a screenwriter and author, **WILLIAM G. BORCHERT** was nominated for an Emmy for writing the highly acclaimed

Warner Brothers/*Hallmark Hall of Fame* movie *My Name Is Bill W.*, which starred James Garner, James Woods, and JoBeth Williams. The film, which focused on the founding of the worldwide movement of Alcoholics Anonymous, was based on material gathered from personal interviews and in-depth research.

Mr. Borchert began his career as a journalist, working first as a reporter for one of New York City's largest daily newspapers and also for a major media wire service. Later, as a byline feature writer, he covered and wrote about some of the nation's most important news stories—from Governor George Wallace barring the doors of the University of Alabama against black students to the U.S.–Soviet Union space race to the last execution in Sing Sing penitentiary's electric chair.

After writing for a national magazine and creating syndicated shows for radio, Mr. Borchert became a partner at Artists Entertainment Complex, a new independent film and production company that went on to produce a number of box office hits. These included *Kansas City Bomber* starring Raquel Welch, *Serpico* starring Al Pacino, and *Dog Day Afternoon* also starring Al Pacino.

Mr. Borchert has also written a number of books including *The Skyline Is a Promise*, *The Lois Wilson Story: When Love Is Not Enough*, *Sought Through Prayer and Meditation*, and *50 Quiet Miracles That Changed Lives*.

In addition to his other films, he also cowrote the screenplay for the Entertainment One/*Hallmark Hall of Fame* movie *When Love Is Not Enough*, which was based on his book about Lois Wilson, the cofounder of the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon. The movie stars Winona Ryder as Lois Wilson and Barry Pepper as Bill Wilson.

A member of the Writers Guild of America and a director of the Stepping Stones Foundation, Mr. Borchert now lives in

Little River, South Carolina, with his lovely wife, Bernadette, where they are frequently visited by their nine children and twenty-three grandchildren.

HAZELDEN, a national nonprofit organization founded in 1949, helps people reclaim their lives from the disease of addiction. Built on decades of knowledge and experience, Hazelden offers a comprehensive approach to addiction that addresses the full range of patient, family, and professional needs, including treatment and continuing care for youth and adults, research, higher learning, public education and advocacy, and publishing.

A life of recovery is lived “one day at a time.” Hazelden publications, both educational and inspirational, support and strengthen lifelong recovery. In 1954, Hazelden published *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, the first daily meditation book for recovering alcoholics, and Hazelden continues to publish works to inspire and guide individuals in treatment and recovery, and their loved ones. Professionals who work to prevent and treat addiction also turn to Hazelden for evidence-based curricula, informational materials, and videos for use in schools, treatment programs, and correctional programs.

Through published works, Hazelden extends the reach of hope, encouragement, help, and support to individuals, families, and communities affected by addiction and related issues.

For questions about Hazelden publications,
please call **800-328-9000**
or visit us online at **hazelden.org/bookstore**.

1000 YEARS OF SOBRIETY features the moving personal accounts of twenty men and women who have all remained sober through dedication to the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) program for more than fifty years. These are the real “old timers,” keepers of the wisdom—men and women from around the world who are among the dwindling generations who came into the program when Bill W. was still alive and whose very existence, their commitment to sobriety, is testament to the power of AA today.

The inspiring stories collected here follow the time-tested formula used by millions of recovering people everywhere who share their stories of hope in meetings every day. They tell us what they were like as active alcoholics and what triggered their decision to join AA. They offer the dramatic details of how they got sober and describe what it's like for them now—how they continue to stay sober today and reap the rewards of recovery. Those who share their stories in *1000 Years of Sobriety* are living proof that the human connection bonded by the Twelve Steps has unsurpassed powers, and that AA is a program for generations to come.

William G. Borchert is the author of *The Lois Wilson Story: When Love Is Not Enough*, which was made into a *Hallmark Hall of Fame* movie; *Sought through Prayer and Meditation*; and *50 Quiet Miracles That Changed Lives*, all published by Hazelden.

Michael Fitzpatrick is one of the leading historians in the field of alcoholism, specializing in the development of the Twelve Step movement. His work has included the restoration and digitization of one of the largest audio archives related to the Twelve Step movement.

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