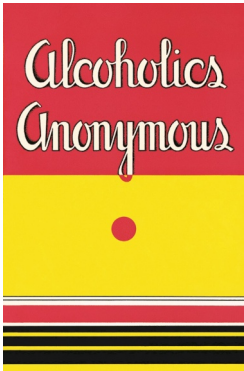




The Eighty - Six

Kawartha District 86 Archives Newsletter Sept, 2024

Our "Big Book" Turns 85 (April, 2024)



This book became a blueprint for recovery from alcoholism that has been followed successfully for over 85 years. The Big Book has been translated into over 70 languages and is read by millions of people in approximately 180 countries around the world. Approximately 40 million copies of the first four editions of the Big Book have been distributed. It sells about one million copies per year, worldwide.

The "Big Book" Story

(1936.) "I was lying in bed one night with an imaginary ulcer attack ... and I said, 'My God, we're starving to death here on Clinton Street.' By this time the house was full of drunks. They were eating us out of house and home. In those days we never believed in charging anybody anything - so Lois was earning the money, I was being the missionary and the drunks were eating the meals. 'This can't go on. We've got to have those drunk tanks, we've got to have those missionaries and we've got to have a book. That's for sure.'" Bill W., Ft. Worth, Texas, 1954.

"... my friend was Henry P., a one-time Standard Oil executive and the very first alcoholic to ever stay sober even a little while in the New York group. He had been a protégé of Dr. Silkworth and a frequent visitor at Towns Hospital. ... "

"A former agnostic, Hank (Henry) came to believe in some sort of universal power, but he led the fight ... in the debate about God in the twelve steps, which resulted in the compromise 'God as we understood Him' being adopted."

"Our enterprise still lacked two essentials. It was not incorporated and it did not have a name. Henry took care of these matters. ... Next day I found out that Henry had bought a pad of blank stock certificates ... and across the top ... was typed ... 'Works Publishing, Inc., par value \$25.00.' So, the great enterprise was launched." Bill W.



Ruth Hock, 1945

Ruth Hock was a non-alcoholic native of Newark, NJ. She was Secretary for Henry P. 's Honor Dealers company and came to work for Bill & Henry P. in 1936 at 17 William Street, Newark. She was Bill's 1st secretary & office manager from 1936-1942. She became the 1st A.A. secretary. She typed the manuscript for the Big Book as Bill dictated.

"Ruth often worked without pay, taking the then seemingly worthless stock of Works Publishing instead. I recall with deep gratitude how often her wise advice and her good humor and patience helped to settle the endless squabbles about the book's content." Bill W., AACA pg. 16.



John D Rockefeller, Jr., having been approached by Bill W. for money, sent Frank Amos to Akron to investigate the "Alcoholic Group." The 'Amos Report' detailed the state of A.A. as of Feb., 1938.

AA and the Rockefeller Connection - Jay Moore

"Week after week, Henry raced around among the stock subscribers, prodding them for their instalments. In addition to this ..., we were able to secure \$2,500 from Mr. Charles B. Towns. Most of these funds had to be devoted to office expenses and groceries for Henry, Ruth, Lois, and myself, and we kept going on this basis until April, 1939, the publication date of the book ..." Bill W.

"One member of the Akron Group was a former newspaperman with two years of sobriety, named Jim. He and Dr. Bob went after all the Akronites who had substantial sobriety records for testimonial material. In most cases Jim interviewed the prospects and wrote their stories for them. Dr. Bob wrote his own. By January, the Akron Group had come up with 18 stories." Bill W.

"In New York, where there was no one with writing expertise, they decided that each member with substantial sobriety would write his own story. When Bill and a fellow member turned to edit these "amateur attempts," there were objections. Who were we, said the writers, to edit their stories? ... a good question, but still we did edit them. The cries of the anguished edited tale-tellers finally subsided and the story section of the book was complete in the latter part of January, 1939. So, at last, was the text."

More than 100 titles were considered ... in the end, it came down to "Alcoholics Anonymous" or "The Way Out," and when the two groups voted, "The Way Out" received a slight majority. ... one of the A.A.s visited the Library of Congress to research the number of books titled "The Way Out" versus those called "Alcoholics Anonymous." There were 12 with the former ... none with the latter, and since nobody wanted to make the book the thirteenth "Way Out," the problem was solved.

"So, this somewhat shaky, often fearful group of men and women somehow brought to publication, on April 10, 1939, the book Alcoholics Anonymous.

We still had to get this book printed. So, we go up to Cornwall Press, which is the largest printer in the world, ... and we asked about printing and they said they'd be glad to do it and how many books would we like? ... How much of a down payment are you going to make? ... we said ... let's print 5,000 just to start with. We said we wouldn't need much (money) ... after all, we're friends of Mr. Rockefeller ... "

"So, Blackwell (of Cornwall Press) started printing the 5,000 books (4,730 books were actually printed) ... So, we spent the last \$500 on the postal card shower and mailed them out (to every physician east of the Rocky Mountains advertising a 'sure-cure' for alcoholism)." [After (a few) days, they checked PO Box 658 and had a grand total of 12 returned postcards, 10 of which were illegible.]

A Talk by Bill W., Ft. Worth, Texas, 1954.

"Then the Sheriff moved in on the office, poor Mr. Blackwell wondered what to do for money ... (not to mention the shareholders and debt holders), the house that Lois and I lived in was foreclosed and we and our furniture moved out on the street. Such was the state of the book Alcoholics Anonymous and the state of grace the Wilson's were in the summer of 1939." Bill W., Ft. Worth, Texas, 1954.



"Charles Towns (Towns Hospital) ... tried to get publicity for A.A. and finally succeeded. He had known Morris Markey, ... for years. Markey was intrigued by what Towns told him of A.A. and approached Fulton Oursler, then editor of 'Liberty,' ... Oursler saw the possibilities ... and said 'Bring that story in here , and we will print it in September (1939).' Liberty received 800 pleas for help, which were ... turned over to Bill W. who turned them over to Ruth Hock for a response. She wrote fine personal letters to every one of them, enclosing a

leaflet which described the A.A. book. Several hundred books sold at once at full retail price of \$3.50." Bill W., Ft. Worth, Texas, 1954.



Cleveland Plain Dealer Elrick Davis Articles Oct. - Nov., 1939.

The thirteen reliable members of the Cleveland group handled as many as 500 calls in the first month following the appearance of Davis' articles.

In 1940, Mr. Rockefeller gave a dinner for many of his prominent New York friends to publicize A.A. This brought yet another flood of pleas. Each inquiry received a personal letter and a small pamphlet. Attention was also drawn to the book Alcoholics Anonymous, which soon moved into brisk circulation.



In March, 1941, the Saturday Evening Post article was published. The reader-mail was astonishing. Most of it came from desperate drinkers or their wives, or from mothers, fathers or interested friends. The letters were forwarded to the A.A. office in New York and from there were sent on to A.A. groups nearest the writers

"Mr. Chipman (adviser to J D Rockefeller, Jr. and A.A. Trustee) did most of the work in raising the \$8,000 which was needed to pay off the shareholders and Mr. Charles B. Towns in full, thus making the Foundation the sole owner of the A.A. book and putting it in trust for our society for all time." AACA pg. 15.