



# The Eighty - Six

Kawartha District 86 Archives Newsletter Mar. 2025

## Henrietta Seiberling and the Beginning of A.A.



Shortly after the death of Bill W. in Jan. of 1971, **Henrietta Seiberling** was asked to speak at the 1971 "Founders Day" annual meeting in Akron, Ohio. Henrietta lived in New York, but was unable to travel, so her son John was asked to speak in her place. John called her on the telephone and tape recorded the conversation to use parts of in his talk. Many people subsequently asked for a copy and John had one transcribed. Following are parts of that transcription.

### Transcript of Parts of Henrietta Seiberling's Story

I would like to tell about Bob in the beginning. Bob and Anne came into the Oxford Group which ... was the movement which tried to recapture the power of first century Christianity in the modern world ... . Someone spoke to me about Bob Smith's drinking. He didn't think that people knew it. And I decided that the people who shared in the Oxford Group had never shared very costly things to make Bob lose his pride and share what he thought would cost him a great deal. So I decided to gather together some Oxford Group people for a meeting and that was at T. Henry Williams' house. We met afterwards there for 5 or 6 years every Wednesday night.

I warned Anne that I was going to have this meeting. I didn't tell her it was for Bob, but I said "Come prepared to mean business. There is going to be no pussyfooting around." And we all shared very deeply our shortcomings ... and then there was silence, and I waited and thought, "Will Bob say something?" Sure enough, in that deep, serious tone of his, he said, " ... I am going to tell you something that may cost me my profession. I am a silent drinker, and I can't stop." This was weeks before Bill came to Akron. So we said, "Do you want to go down on your knees and pray?" And he said "Yes." And so we did.

And the next morning, I ... was saying a prayer for Bob. Something said to me, I call it 'guidance' - "Bob must not touch one drop of Alcohol."



Stan Hywet Gatehouse

So I called Bob and said I had guidance for him - and this is very important. He came over at 10 in the morning and I told him that my guidance was that he mustn't touch one drop of alcohol. He was very disappointed ... . And then ... he said, "Henrietta, I don't understand it. Nobody understands it."

I said, "Well, Bob, that was what I had been guided about." And that was the beginning of our meetings, long before Bill ever came.

Now, let me recall some of Bill's very words ... . Bill, when he was in an hotel in Akron and down to a few dollars and owed his bill after his business venture fell through, looked at the cocktail room and was tempted ... . Instead, having been sober 5 months in the Oxford group, he said a prayer. He got the guidance to look in a ministers directory, and a strange thing happened. He put his finger on one name: Tunks. So, Bill called Dr. Tunks, and Dr. Tunks gave him a list of names. Dr. Tunks was Mr. Harvey Firestone's minister, and Mr. Firestone had brought ... Oxford group people down there ... out of gratitude for helping his son ... . One of them said " ... you can call Henrietta Seiberling." Bill called, and I will never forget what he said: "I'm from the Oxford group and I'm a rum hound." And I said "You come right out here." And so he came out to my house, and he stayed for dinner. And I told him to come to church with me next morning and I would get Bob, which I did.

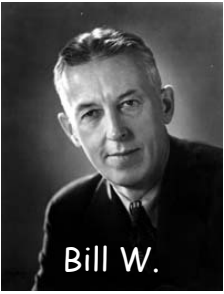
Bill stayed in Akron. He didn't have any money. There was a neighbour of mine ... and I ... asked him to put Bill up at the country club for two weeks or so ... . After that, Bill went to stay with Bob and Anne for three months. And we started working on Bill D. and Ernie G.

The need was there, and all the necessary elements were furnished by God. Bill the promoter, and I, not being an alcoholic, for perspective. Every Wednesday night I would speak on some new experience or spiritual idea that I had read. That's the way we all grew. Eventually the meetings moved to King School. Some man from Hollywood came, an actor, and he said he had been all over the country and that there was something in the King School Group that wasn't in any other group. I think it was our great stress and reliance on guidance and quiet times.

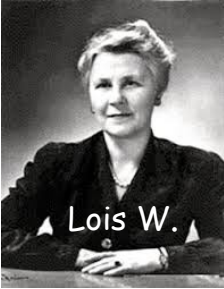
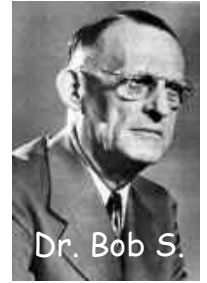
**Note:**

Henrietta Buckler Seiberling 1888 - 1979. 1935 Residence Stan Hywet Gatehouse.

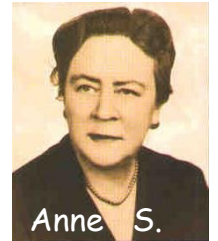
## When Bill Met Bob



After Bill had told Henrietta that he needed to help another drunk in order to stay sober himself, she said "I know just the man for you. He is a doctor. We all call him 'Dr. Bob.' His wife, Anne, is a grand person. Bob has tried so hard; I know he wants to stop. He has tried medical cures, he has tried various religious approaches, including the Oxford Groups. He has tried with all his will, but somehow he cannot seem to do it. So how would you like to talk with Dr. Bob and Anne?"



Anne said, "I'm sorry Henrietta, I don't think we can make it today. Bob always makes a great fuss over me on Mother's Day. He has just come home, bringing a big potted plant."



What Anne didn't say was that the plant was on a table and that Bob was under the table ... . Henrietta said, "What about tomorrow? Why can't both of you come over for dinner?" Anne said they would try and make it.

Next afternoon at five o'clock, that wonderful couple, Dr. Bob and Anne, stood at Henrietta's open door.

This was the man who was to be my partner and founder of Akron's Group Number One. With the remarkable Sister Ignatia, he was to care for 5,000 cases of alcoholism in the time when A.A. was still very young. This was the friend with whom I never had a hard word. This was Dr. Bob, A.A.'s co-founder-to-be.

But at five o'clock that Sunday afternoon Bob did not look much like a founder. He was shaking badly. Uneasily he told us that he could only stay for about fifteen minutes. After dinner, which he did not eat, Henrietta discreetly put us off in her little library. There Bob and I talked until eleven o'clock.

In our first conversation I bore down heavily on the medical hopelessness of Dr. Bob's case, freely using Dr. Silkworth's words, describing the alcoholic's dilemma, the "obsession plus allergy" theme.

Even though he could not make them work, he already knew what the spiritual answers were. What really hit him hard was the medical business ... . And the fact that I was an alcoholic and knew what I was talking about ... . And this mutual give-and-take is at the heart of all of A.A.'s Twelfth Step work today.



## The "A. A." Way

■ ■ ■

I found myself in a bottomless pit, Of sorrow of woe and despair.  
When a ray of light revealed to me, The steps of a winding stair.

In vain, I tried to reach those steps. Of myself it could not be done.  
When I cried for help, A voice replied, "You are standing on step number one".

Whose voice it was I could not tell, And I asked, "Just who are you?"  
"Please don't go away, You are helping me." He said, "You are standing on step number two".

I had found a Friend, who could help me out, I knew He could set me free.  
I trusted in Him, Whoever He was, And He led me to step number three.

I sat on this step and thought of myself, As I never had thought before.  
Of my wasted life, and the harm I had done. He showed me to step number four.

Then I said to this Friend. "Whoever you are, I would be better dead than alive,  
For I am a cheat, A liar and thief". He said, "You are standing on step number five".

"With you as a Friend, A helper and guide, I can rise from this terrible fix,  
I'll do as you say, if you'll lead the way". He said, "You are now on step number six."

"I know I am not worth the help you are giving, To me its like Manna from Heaven.  
I'll do my best to mend my ways". You are standing on step number seven."

"I harmed my wife, My children, My friends, But will amend before it's too late".  
Then the voice by my side, so gently replied. "You are standing on step number eight."

"I will make amends wherever I can, When the power to do so is mine."  
Again came the voice, more clear than before. "You are on step number nine".

"I'll admit I've been wrong, but want to go right, And stand as a man among men."  
Again came the voice of the Man of my choice. "You are now on step number ten".

This Man by my side, such a wonderful Friend, He was surely sent from Heaven.  
I shall always be thankful for what He has done, Then He led me to step number eleven.

When Lo and Behold, I had reached the top, The day was bright and fair,  
Then I thought of those, I had left behind, In that bottomless pit of despair.

The ray of Light, which came to me, And revealed the winding stair,  
Came from a torch in the hand of a Friend, I must throw my light in there.

This torch is a guide to show the way, I must see that it's always lit,  
Without this light, I can easily fall, To the depth of that bottomless pit.

I must never forget this wonderful Friend, In whose joy I now can delve.  
He is with me each day and I hear Him say, "You are now on step number twelve."

To steer ourselves clear of this bottomless pit, Where woe and sorrow are rife.  
There is one sure way, "Take it day by day, follow the A. A. way of life."

The "A.A." Way was written by Ada K. She and her husband, Charles, a.k.a. 'Doc', lived in Dover, Ohio, and used to cottage at Trent River circa 1950. They were supportive of local meetings and used to host picnics at their cottage. They are listed in the 1950 US Census in Dover, which is about 50 miles south of Akron.