

Anderson Beginnings

The following is from the HANDOUT newsletter interview story given in 1982, by Anderson's A.A. founder George & Frances L.

Foreword

It is hard to pinpoint events in A.A. history as the beginnings of this or that. Did A.A. begin when Ebby sat across the table from Bill, or when Bill first talked to Dr. Bob, or at some other specific time? When one looks for a place to start telling the story of A.A.'s origin in a given area, there does seem to be a common denominator. The point at which an alcoholic, driven to hopelessness by his drinking, first sees another one with whom he can identify, who is no longer a victim of this obsession, is the point at which the spark of hope is struck, and the adventure of recovery begins.

This point in the history of A.A. in Anderson occurred in a Beech Grove sanitarium in June of 1943, when George L. was visited by Doherty S. and Harry M. George has not had a drink of alcohol since that meeting, over 39 years ago, and his adventure has multiplied itself to include all of us and our groups.

It is hoped that the recounting of these events of our history will be a source of deeper identity with A.A. as a movement and of a greater unity among us as groups and individuals. When we go to our meetings we may realize that their existence and our own is a part of a larger story made possible by those who recovered and carried the message before us. The future of it all depends squarely on us and our gratitude. When we look to George as a still active member and Intergroup Representative, after 39 years in the program, we do not lack the power of example.

We may also note that our history, like those of other areas, shows our debt to the many non-alcoholics who were instrumental in our development and our survival, both as a movement and as individuals.

Thanks to Frances, George, Boots, and the archives of the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous for their help and encouragement.

Dilemma

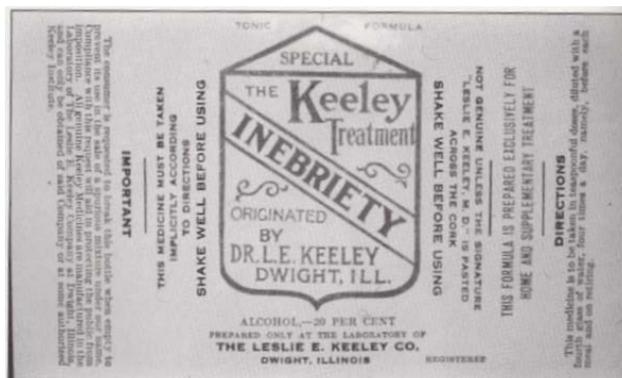
By 1942, George L.'s alcoholism was well down the road. Maybe it would be better to refer to it as well off the road,

because that is where his car kept landing. The roads were a bit slicker for him than they were for regular folks, and the sun kept getting in his eyes and causing him to lose control. Of course he had been drinking a little, but it seemed to him that he was having a run of bad luck.

It had been a long time since he had been without a drink for even a day, and George couldn't imagine any way to live without drinking. After one of his one-car collisions, he went to a doctor, who had helped him out of a scrape before, to have his injuries treated. Again, the doctor helped him, holding the law at the front door while George was leaving by the back. George returned later to talk with the doctor about how to do something about his drinking.

The pressure was increasing and he had tried every way he could come up with to control his drinking. He knew that he needed help. The doctor had already told him that alcoholism was the problem, so George looked to the friendly doctor for help. Maybe the medical profession had an answer for his problem. So George embarked on a conquest of his alcoholism via the medical route.

"The Cure" and "Taking the Cure" were common terms in the 1940's. It is not uncommon to hear them yet. A large number of cures and remedies were available. Or you'd hear of somebody going to Dwight, Illinois, or somewhere to "Take the Cure."



Label of The Keeley Treatment Bottle

The first "Cure" that George took was when the doctor told him to bring in a quart of whiskey. The doctor poured out some of the whiskey and put some medicine in the bottle. He told George that when he craved a drink he should take a drink from the bottle. George did it. And he got sick. And he did it again and he got sick again. As George remembered the story, he said, "It would make you sick to your stomach. I'd try and try to get some of it down and it wouldn't stay down. So finally I got mad and threw it away and went and got me some good whiskey." And so, as he said, that cure didn't take.

The next "Cure" that George tried was of the "taking a trip" variety. He decided to take a well-known cure at a hospital in Dwight, Illinois. Frances drove the car and, of course, George drank all the way there. They would not let George into the hospital. He was too far gone for them to treat. "I was really in bad shape when I got there. I was very disappointed. I think that, at the time, the cost was \$300. I had the money and everything and I intended to go, and whatever it took, I was going to try to do it."

But it did not work out. George said, "I went in and they took me in the office and interviewed me and talked to me. Then they came out and the two of them got together and then they finally came out and told us that they would not take me in because I would either die or go insane."

George had had a lot of hope that this [treatment program] would be his answer, but at the age of 28, he was told that he would soon develop a wet brain and die. It was just a matter of time, and not much time at that. With his hopes of taking this well-known cure dashed, George and Frances could only get in the car and make the long drive back home to Fowler, Indiana. George recalled that he was very depressed. All of his hope for taking the Keeley Cure had been destroyed.

The Keeley Institute was founded in 1879, and the "Keeley Cure" was a national byword. It advertised its "double chloride of gold" treatment as being "the only original and genuine" method of reclaiming the sots of "this rum cursed nation" and its literature boasted of treating over 17,000 physicians. But it was not to be the answer for George.

Upon returning to Fowler, George tried to control his drinking for a while, but he could not. With his condition increasingly desperate, he saw his doctor, who made arrangements for his admission into a sanitarium in Shelbyville, Indiana. Neither George nor the doctor had much confidence that it would help, but something had to be done.

Frances accompanied George to the sanitarium and it went well enough for the first couple of days, but on the third day of separation from alcohol, George went into D.T.'s. They had been permitted to go into town to watch the horse races, and it was there that George began to lose his use of reason. He recalls that he [would be] about to say one thing and something else came out. He lost control and started to behave erratically. He demanded that Frances get something for him to drink. He knew that he would be all right if he could only get something to drink. But Frances brought back an empty bag and lured George back to the sanitarium, dry.

The proprietor of the sanitarium tried to quiet George down, without any success. When George broke out a window and became violent, Frances was told that she would have to take him elsewhere. They talked of sending him to the State Hospital, but a patient who was a lawyer urged them not sign anything. He told them that if you went there, you wouldn't get out. Frances would not sign for him to be sent there. The proprietor then called the Ben Hur Sanitarium in [the Indianapolis suburb of] Beech Grove, and George was sent there in an ambulance. He had gone into convulsions and was in a strait jacket. When he arrived at Ben Hur, he had to wait in the ambulance for three hours while they looked for a doctor to admit and treat him.

They did find a doctor who would admit him, and she administered medication and finally quieted George enough that he was allowed to remain there. George was in such a state that there was very little hope for recovery. It looked like the end. Frances waited from hour to hour for him to be no more. Then the ray of hope came when his condition began to improve and he began to regain the use of reason.

When his condition had stabilized and he was quieted with medication, George knew that medicine held no answer for his condition. After all he had been through, he still craved alcohol. The rounds of the sanitariums had proved to him that he had to drink or he would go insane. He knew that he would have to go on and drink to the end. There seemed to be no way out. He could not drink and he could not quit drinking. His mind was still coming and going, but even in his condition, he knew that he was hopeless and that he was helpless. There was nothing to do and no place to turn.

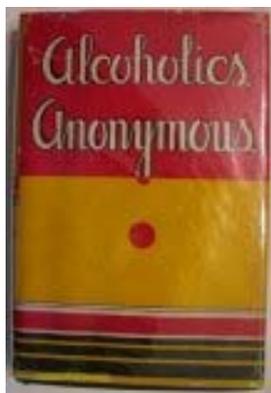
The doctor and the nurse asked if George would like to talk to someone from Alcoholics Anonymous. Neither George nor Frances had ever heard of Alcoholics Anonymous, so Frances sought the counsel of a priest in Beech Grove about it [this was the Indianapolis suburb where the sanitarium was located]. After hearing Frances relate the story of George's drinking and his present condition, the priest replied, "You have tried everything else. What do you have to lose?"

Arrangements were made for two men from Alcoholics Anonymous to visit George in the sanitarium. George did not know that his hopelessness was about to end.

Hope

Doherty S. and Harry M. were the two men who called on George in the sanitarium. They gave him something that he needed: hope. They told him that there was an answer.

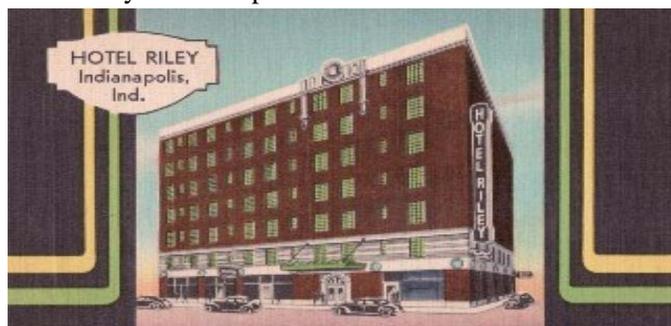
They had tried it and it was working for them. They gave George a copy of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* and told him that the way of life that they were talking about was detailed in that volume. They told him of a growing fellowship that was available to all alcoholics who wished to try it.



1st Edition Big Book

This was the first time in his life that George had ever seen anyone as bad as he was, who was not still drinking. He could tell from their stories about themselves that they had been as bad about their drinking as he was. He could tell that they were like he was, that they thought the same way as he did, that they felt the same way as he did, but that they had found a way to live without drinking--they had, in effect, been given release from the compulsion to drink.

This simple but powerful process of identification, coupled with the power of example, has touched many alcoholics at a very deep level of consciousness. This process is at the heart of our program, giving hope to the hopeless, and giving the power of example to the powerless. This is how it worked for George, and in turn for each of us. Frances read the book to George in the sanitarium and he went to his first A.A. meeting at the Riley Hotel [in Indianapolis] before they went home to Fowler [back in western] Indiana. George had a few reservations about whether this thing would work for him or not, but he was encouraged by the example of these two sober men.



It was hard for George to return to his old surroundings sober, but he did. Doherty and Harry sponsored him by mail, and he went back to the Riley Hotel for a meeting once every month. Between meetings Doherty and Harry would send him things to read and give him encouragement to keep on going. There were no others in his area to talk with about how to stay sober and work the program. He did manage to stay sober and after about six months he and Frances moved to Anderson seeking employment.

In November of 1943 there were as many A.A.'s in Anderson as there had been in Fowler: George! But it was a big improvement because he was now able to telephone his sponsors when he needed to, he was able to go to meetings in Indianapolis more often, and since he worked nights he could go to the Indiana Home treatment facility and drink coffee in the dining room and visit with A.A.'s and patients there in the daytime. He followed up all the leads he was given, but none proved out. George stayed sober for three years, the only A.A. in Anderson.

Late in 1946, an A.A. named Bob B. came from Indianapolis to live here for a time. He looked up George at once. Now George had another member of A.A. right here in Anderson to talk with about their common problem. It had been three and a half years since he had quit drinking and now it was no longer necessary to drive fifty miles to see another A.A. George and Bob got together often and were soon joined by Clyde L., an Anderson man who had just sobered up at the old Indiana Home. Then Bob S. joined up and offered his home as a meeting place and a little meeting started. *It had been a long time coming.*



THE INDIANA HOME

Launched

It was time for a public meeting. Frances sent letters to all of the doctors and clergymen in the area and Judge Achor offered his courtroom as a meeting place. A notice was placed in the *Anderson Herald*. Doherty and Mac (Herman Mc., the proprietor of the Indiana Home) came from Indianapolis to make a public presentation about A.A. On February 9, 1947 the first public meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous was held. It was not a large meeting as far as numbers go. There were fewer than twenty people there. About half of that number were alcoholics. There were George and Frances, Doherty and Mac, Bob B., Clyde L., Bob S., Russ A., Jim D., Boots C., a couple of doctors and a couple of ministers, the judge, and a handful of other interested parties. It was, however, a milestone for A.A. in Anderson. Our non-alcoholic friends were with us and our local fellowship was launched.



It was not long before there was a meeting held regularly in a public place, the YMCA. Then Saint John's Hospital made meeting space available and began to admit alcoholics. There came to be meetings in increasing numbers, both day and night, and the fellowship grew up around George just like the Big Book told him it would. A Post Office Box, a Telephone Number and an Answering Service, an Intergroup, the fellowship of Al-Anon, a Club, and even a Newsletter to tell this sketch of our Beginnings.

So let us not take for granted the fellowship that we have. It is the result of the work of many hands. It is the legacy of those who went before us and, like all growing things; it must be tended and nurtured. It can wither and die in the hands of the apathetic just as it has grown in the hands of the grateful and the willing.

Our debt to those who went before us must be paid to those who are yet to come. Our gratitude, willingness, and adherence to our Traditions will determine our future course. May we treat it like the priceless gift it is and enjoy the blessing of sharing it with still others. May other fellowships based on the same principles as ours is given the hope they need by this example.

“Thus we grow. And so can you, though you be but one man with this book in your hand. We believe and hope it contains all you will need to begin.

We know what you are thinking. You are saying to yourself: "I'm jittery and alone. I couldn't do that." But you can. You forget that you have just now tapped a source of power much greater than yourself. To duplicate, with such backing, what we have accomplished is only a matter of willingness, patience and labor.”

--*Alcoholics Anonymous* pp. 162–163



From the *Anderson Herald*, February 8, 1947:

Alcoholics Anonymous Plan Meeting Sunday

A public meeting to acquaint Andersonians with the work of Alcoholics Anonymous will be held in the superior court room at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 9. Judge Harold Achor will act as chairman of the meeting and members of the Alcoholics Anonymous chapters from Indianapolis and other neighboring cities will have delegations here to explain the purposes and methods of the organization. A local chapter has now been formed. Many members of the medical profession and clergymen have already indicated they would be present for the meeting which is simply to give information on the organization which is causing so much comment throughout the nation.

2012 Update:

George L. died of natural causes May 16, 1993, just 2 months short of 50 years of sobriety. Francis placed his 50 year token with him saying he earned it. There are over 50 meetings in the Anderson area and George's Home Group, the Central Group still meets on Tuesday night at the Anderson Center @ 8:00 p.m.