

ERNIE G. - AA #4?

The man generally considered AA number 4 was Ernie Galbraith, who first got sober in the summer of 1935, when Bill Wilson was still staying with the Smiths in Akron.

Described as a wild, devil-may care young fellow (page 158 in the Big Book); he had enlisted for a one-year term in the Army when he was only 14 (but could pass for 18). After getting out of the Army he went to Mexico where he worked for an oil company, then "rode the range" in Texas. He had been married twice and had a son. After returning to Akron he had trouble holding a job because of his drinking.

His parents were very religious and belonged to the same church as T. Henry and Clarace Williams of the Oxford Group. It was probably they who told Ernie's parents about how Dr. Bob and Bill Wilson had found a way to quit drinking. They urged Ernie to go to see Dr. Bob and eventually he did.

He agreed to be taken to City Hospital where he was tapered off. It took several days, he wrote, "for my head to clear and my nerves to settle." After about six days in the hospital he was visited by Dr. Bob, Bill Wilson and Bill Dotson, who explained their program to him, and he agreed to give it a try. "And it worked," he wrote, "as long as I allowed it to do so."

He only "allowed it to do so" for about a year and then "became self-confident and then careless." He went on a seven-month slip.

Finally, after seven months of drinking, he went back "unshaven, unkempt, ill-looking, bleary-eyed," and asked for help again. He wrote that he was never lectured about his "seven month failure."

Ernie "never really jelled," according to Dr. Bob. Sue remembered that "they didn't quite know what to do with him. He even got to where he wanted to get paid for speaking at meetings."

He had periodic relapses, which got worse and worse until the time he died.

Dr. Bob's daughter, Sue, about 17 at the time, said that the first time she saw Ernie he stopped her on the street to ask her how to get to Dr. Smith's house. She pointed out the house, but didn't tell him that she was Sue Smith.

Beginning shortly after she finished grade school, Sue had been seeing a boy named Ray Windows. She claims that her parents disapproved of Ray and tried to break them up.

Sue believes her father deliberately tried to get her interested in Ernie in order to keep her away from Ray.

She didn't like Ernie at first; she thought he was a "smarty." She described him as "stout, with reddish hair and a round face with blue eyes. He was outgoing, the life-of-the-party type. Ernie was single then and he kept coming to the house, and I think my dad got the bright idea that if he could get Ernie to take me out, and he'd pay the way, he might be able to get me away from Ray. We'd go down and get hamburgers, and Dad would buy them. I knew all that, but I didn't realize it was in connection with Ray at the time. Now I think it was. I think Dad was using Ernie, and it backfired on him."

When Ray got a job out of town and moved away, "Ernie gradually started to have some appeal," Sue wrote. "He was an older person and he had a good sense of humor. We always had fun. We joked together. He was a real storyteller. He could make my Mom and Dad laugh like nobody I've ever seen, just sitting around the kitchen table, telling stories, and drinking coffee. Like I say, they were pushing me, so I figured they liked him. And that was kind of different."

Sue still saw Ray when he would come home for visits, but eventually she broke it off with Ray and married Ernie. Her parents disapproved, perhaps for other reasons as well, but certainly because they knew Ernie was drinking again.

He was drunk when he married Sue in September of 1941. Her parents did not attend. Sue said she never told them she was married and believed they had heard about it or read it in the papers.

The only witnesses, besides the minister, were Ernie's parents. Sue had moved out of her parent's home about nine month's before, with the admonition from Dr. Bob, "Just remember, young lady, wherever you go, you take yourself with you."

Sue said that Ernie continued drinking that time until about 1946, when "the only reason he quit was the doctor thought he had a heart condition, and it scared him to death. I don't think he ever had a heart condition. I don't think he had a heart."

While Sue was somewhat reconciled with her parents, apparently they were never again close. Sue said they didn't visit or send flowers when her children were born. They never said anything to Sue about Ernie, but she believes her father "would talk to other people about him. I heard Dad grew a healthy dislike for him. And Bill -- well, Bill came down one time when Ernie and I were still together, and Bill and I made this tape about A.A. and Dad. But on that tape, Ernie said something to Bill and Bill shot back at him, 'I gave upon you a long time ago, you son of a bitch!' That's right on the tape."

Sue and Ernie had two children, a son (Mickey) and a daughter (Bonna).

Ernie and Sue divorced about 1965 and he remarried.

On June 11, 1969, Bonna shot herself, after first killing her six-year old daughter. She was 23 at the time of her death. Sue claims that Bonna was an alcoholic and was also using "diet pills."

Sue wrote, "Ernie never got over it. Bonna died June 11, 1969, and he died two years later to the day, June 11, 1971." Later Sue married her childhood sweetheart, Ray Windows. Ray died August 3, 1989.

Sources: "The Children of the Healer, the Story of Dr. Bob's Kids" and "Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers".

Nancy O.

Ernie Galbraith's Story in the First Edition of the Big Book

THE SEVEN MONTH SLIP

AT FOURTEEN years of age, when I should have been at home under the supervision of my parents, I was in the United States army serving a one year enlistment. I found myself with a bunch of men none too good for a fourteen-year-old kid who passed easily for eighteen. I transferred my hero-worshipping to these men of the world. I suppose the worst damage done in that year in the army barracks was the development of an almost unconscious admiration for their apparently jolly sort of living.

Once out of uniform I went to Mexico where I worked for an oil company. Here I learned to take on a good cargo of beer and hold it. Later I rode the range in the Texas cow country and often went to town with the boys to "whoop it up on payday." By the time I returned to my home in the Middle West I had learned several patterns of living, to say nothing of a cock-sure attitude that I needed no advice from anyone.

The next ten years are sketchy. During this time I married and established my own home and everything was lovely for a time. Soon I was having a good time getting around the law in speakeasies. Oh yes, I outsmarted our national laws but I was not quite successful in evading the old moral law.

I was working for a large industrial concern and had been promoted to a supervisory job. In spite of big parties, I was for three or four years able to be on the job the next morning. Then gradually the hangovers became more persistent and I found myself not only needing a few shots of liquor before I could go to work at all, but finally found it advisable to stay at home and sober up by the taper-off method. My bosses tried to give me some good advice. When that didn't help they tried more drastic measures, laying me off without pay. They covered up my too frequent absences many times in order to keep them from the

attention of the higher officials in the company.

My attitude was that I could handle my liquor whenever I wanted to go about it seriously, and I considered my absences no worse than those of other employees and officials who were getting away with murder in their drinking.

One does not have to use his imagination much to realize that this sort of drinking is hard on the matrimonial relationship. After proving myself neither faithful nor capable of being temperate, my wife left me and obtained a judicial separation. This gave me a really good excuse to get drunk.

In the years 1933 and 1934 I was fired several times, but always got my job back on my promises to do better. On the last occasion I was reduced to the labor gang on the plant. I made a terrific effort to stay sober and prove myself capable of better things. I succeeded pretty well and one day I was called into the production chief's office and told I had met with the approval of the executive department and to be ready to start on a better job.

This good news seemed to justify a mild celebration with a few beers. Exactly four days later I reported for work only to find that they too knew about the "mild" celebration and that they decided to check me out altogether. After a time, I went back and was assigned to one of the hardest jobs in the factory. I was in bad shape physically and after six months of this, I quit, going on a drunk with my last paycheck.

Then I began to find that the friends with whom I had been drinking for some time seemed to disappear.

This made me resentful and I found myself many times

feeling that everybody was against me. Bootleg joints became my hangouts. I sold my books, car, and even clothing in order to buy a few drinks.

I am certain that my family kept me from gravitating to flophouses and gutters. I am eternally thankful to them that they never threw me out or refused me help when I was drinking. Of course, I didn't appreciate their kindness then, and I began to stay away from home on protracted drinking spells.

Somehow my family heard of two men in town who had found a way to quit drinking. They suggested that I contact these men but I retorted "If I can't handle my liquor with my own will power then I had better jump over the viaduct."

Another of my usual drinking spells came on. I drank for about ten days with no food except coffee before I was sick enough to start the battle back to sobriety with the accompanying shakes, night sweats, jittery nerves, and horrible dreams. This time I felt that I really needed some help. I told my mother she could call the doctor who was the center of the little group of former drinkers. She did.

I allowed myself to be taken to a hospital where it took several days for my head to clear and my nerves to settle. Then, one day I had a couple of visitors, one man from New York (Bill W.) and the other a local attorney (Bill D.). During our conversation I learned that they had been as bad as myself in this drinking, and that they had found relief and had been able to make a comeback. Later they went into more detail and put it to me very straight that I'd have to give over my desires and attitudes to a Power higher than myself that would give me new desires and attitudes.

Here was religion put to me in a different way and presented by three (Dr. Bob joins in) past masters in liquor guzzling. On the strength of their stories I decided to give it a try. And it worked, as long as I allowed it to do so.

After a year of learning new ways of living, new attitudes and desires, I became self-confident and then careless. I suppose you would say I got to feel too sure of myself and - ZOWIE! First it was beer on Saturday nights and then it was a fine drunk. I knew exactly what I had done to bring myself to this old grief. I had tried to handle my life on the strength of my own ideas and plans instead of looking to God for the inspiration and the strength.

But I didn't do anything about it. I thought "to hell with everybody. I'm going to do as I please." So I floundered around for seven months refusing help from any quarter. But one day I volunteered to take another drunk on a trip to sober him up. When we got back to town we were both drunk and went to a hotel to sober up. Then I began to reason the thing out. I had been a sober, happy man for a year, living decently and trying to follow the will of God. Now I was unshaven, unkempt, ill looking, and bleary-eyed. I decided then and there and went back to my friends who offered me help and who never lectured me on my seven-month failure.

But that was a long time ago. I don't say now that I can do anything. I only know that as long as I seek God's help to the best of my ability, just so long will liquor never bother me.