

(This is from the Philadelphia Record dated April 1, 1940.)

EX-DRUNKARDS UNITE HERE TO HELP OTHERS

Alcoholics Anonymous Tell How They Won a Hard Fight.

By M. W. Mountjoy

Every Thursday evening in a lecture room of St. Luke's and Children's Hospital, a growing group of former drunkards gets together to buck each other up, swap experiences and greet recruits.

They are the Philadelphia chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous (the "Double A's", which may also stand for absolute abstention) a national non-profit organization that has grown up around a former New York city toper who recovered.

Started eight weeks ago by a member of the New York chapter who came to Philadelphia to live, the group already numbers 50 and is growing at the rate of 10 a week.

CANDOR PREVAILS.

The meeting of these confirmed and confessed alcoholics are curiously convivial and forthright. The one we attended included seven "hopeless" cases that had been lifted out of Philadelphia General Hospital by the chapter, and 14 wives, mothers and sisters, most of whom wore wondering smiles.

The chairman of the evening was an insurance agent. He was anonymous, of course. The chairmanship revolves at each meeting because, a member explained, "if you give a recently dry rummy too much importance he's liable to fall off again." The founder of the chapter, a representative of a New York engineering firm, who has been "dry" two and a half years, took no special part in the proceedings.

"I suppose," the chairman began, "we've all had more or less the same experience. We've paid high-priced doctors, made the rounds of sanitariums, know what the inside of an alcoholic ward looks like and the morning after taste of water from a tin cup in a police station."

He called on a young attorney who walked to the front of the room.

"Was he a lush!" proudly whispered the member next to us.

TOO SORDID TO TELL.

"With your permission I'd rather not tell my story," the attorney said. "It's a sordid one. Up to now my life has been completely self-centered. I think this is true of all alcoholics. In recent years I was a periodic drunk. I stayed sober for months, chiefly as a reaction to my last drinking bout.

"But I won a case in court today, and coming away I had that old feeling of elation, that urge to celebrate. Then I realized I ought to be thankful rather than proud.

"Stopping drinking is not enough. You've still got the bottle heat in you. You've got to be honestly thankful."

Each speaker was roundly applauded. The second was a draftsman who last month panhandled an A.A. for a nickel in a railroad station.

This man read what he had to say.

"I've been sober for 25 days," he testified, "which is my longest period of dryness since 1932." He thanked "the fellows here who broke bread with a social outcast" and commended himself to "the Power that has helped me after all else failed."

The next speaker was a strapping young man with an Irish name.

THEY CAME AND GOT HIM.

"On my last bat," he said, "which I regret to say was not very long ago, they had to come and get me. Now I've already started visiting others."

After that, members stood up and introduced starters, several of whom were living temporarily at the Salvation Army.

That was the formal part of the meeting, which continued conversationally for another hour after which the womenfolk served doughnuts and coffee.

NONE HAS FALLEN.

"Not one of this gang has fallen off yet," an older member confided. "Although, of course, we expect some to. More than half of the national membership (now between 500 and 600) has had no relapse at all. Another quarter had trouble, but is headed for recovery. The other quarter we don't know about.

"We consider that record remarkable, since all of us had been given up as hopeless and had given up hope."

The founder of the Double A's is a tall, tanned broker with a pair of searching eyes and an unassuming manner of speech. Double A's, he reminded us, are not prohibitionists nor, necessarily churchgoers.

A TRUE ALCOHOLIC

"A man may drink steadily all his life with an occasional roaring bender and not be a true alcoholic," says an introductory pamphlet given to recruits. "If anyone who is showing inability to control his drinking can do the right-about-face, our hats are off to him. Heavens knows, we have tried long enough and hard enough to drink like other people.

"We have no desire to make the country dry or anybody else dry unless he happens to be, like us, allergic to alcohol.

HOW THEY DO IT.

"Here are the steps we took toward recovery: (The following is a summary):

"We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable,

"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

"Admitted to God, as we understood Him, to ourselves, and to another human being the nature of our wrongs.

"Made a list of all people we had harmed and made direct amends wherever possible.

"Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him.

"Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

A Houston (Tex.) newspaperman, who started a chapter there, wrote:

"In non-religious terms the experience is like the realization that sometimes comes to a person who has never appreciated good music or good books and who all of a sudden gets the idea of the value and pleasure to be found in them."