

THE CANDYMAN

The candyman was Charles Welch, long-time Vancouver resident, and successful advertising man, and president and managing director of the company that bore his name.

His life had been marked by tragedy. His wife was an alcoholic whose fight against the illness had ended only with her death in the late 1930's. From his agonizing over her plight, he had learned compassion and gained a conviction that somewhere, some place, somehow, there was an answer to alcoholism. He knew the pain, suffering and the frustration of one who helplessly watched the one he loved make promises that were not kept, being driven by an invisible force again and again into the flight from reality that marks the illness.

His wife had been a top-notch candymaker and it had been her skill and talent that they relied on to establish their business. Each time the door of opportunity opened, she became involved with her friend, Mrs. Wilhelmina B., a drunk followed and the door was closed. But in their business there was some progress. He had little difficulty in disposing of his candies. Mrs. B. became an A.A. member after it was established in Vancouver.

His wife's brother Roland McK., of Sacramento, had had a bad record with booze, and in 1938 he made contact with the fledgling Alcoholics Anonymous movement. He didn't succeed and his drinking continued to worsen; for three years he persevered and finally in 1941 sobriety came and with it the insatiable urge to spread the word of hope that is A. A. and to give away the program.

Charlie kept in touch with members of his family in Los Angeles and Sacramento, learning first of Roland's struggles with the program and then, after 1941, his freedom from booze.

He had been in touch with New York while his wife was alive and discovered the spiritual foundations on which the A. A. program is built. He kept in touch with the old Alcoholic Foundation (now the General Service Office) in New York for details and literature on the program and he also sought literature and other material from Roland.

The conviction grew within him that spiritual healing could be the answer to alcoholism.

Sometime prior to 1944, Charlie met in the exclusive Terminal City Club with a small group of Vancouver businessmen and the clergyman, the Rev. J. W. Smith of Collingwood United Church. Others in the group included Frank P., Bill J., Bill R., Arthur C., and Fred T. Later they were joined by Dr. Iser Steinman after his discharge from the R.C.A.F. after the war.

The Rev. Mr. Smith became a staunch supporter of A. A. and many of the members today remember him for his wise counsel, his compassion and his humanity. He saw in the movement first century Christianity at work.

For ten years Dr. Steinman attended to the needs of the alcoholics as they came to the fellowship and many of them were so impressed with his interest and his skills they remained his patients the rest of their lives.

Charlie Welch told the small group after dinner one night of his conviction that the

grace of God could bring alcoholics to recovery.

He outlined to the group what he had learned about A. A. and discussed with them its spiritual concepts.

He told them there was a great need to get A.A. established in Vancouver. "We need a guinea pig," he told the group; and they knelt in prayer for guidance.

"The only way this thing can work is through prayer," he told the group each time they discussed his "project".

Weeks passed, and finally at one of the meetings someone remembered a drunk who had come to the Oxford Group in the early 1930's and who had become sober and stayed sober for a number of years.

A search was started for the man and, finally, he was located on a bender, living on skid road, his home broken, he job gone, and he was deeply in dept.

The time was the early summer of 1944.