

October 1957

BB

Of

AA

The
Ohio
Way...

WE HAVE HEARD that penal AA started at San Quentin Prison in California in 1941. In Ohio we did not get under way until 1949, when, after considerable negotiating, the first meeting was held at the Ohio Penitentiary on June 19. The occasion made an indelible impression on me. The group members present were some sixty-five screened inmates, who sat in the body of the prison auditorium; and twenty-three outside AAs from Cleveland and Columbus, who sat on the stage. It was a new experience for everyone there and each group looked over the other group rather carefully.

Today eleven Ohio correctional institutions hold twelve regular meetings. All the groups did not start at the same time, of course: the second one was at the London Prison Farm, in October 1949. The groups started out well, with outside AAs acting as chairman, secretary,

etc., and providing the speakers. As time went on, these and other groups assumed their full functions, electing their own officers and arranging their own programs.

As I remember it, absolutely nothing was done about AAs who eventually left, either through parole or expiration of their sentence. No one seemed to have any idea that anything should be done. As time went on, however, some of the inside members expressed a desire to join outside groups upon their release. These members who asked for outside help were generally leaders on the inside and were, perhaps, among those who seemed to be most socially oriented. In these cases efforts were made by individual outside members to be of some help, but the vast majority of the members who left the institution had nothing whatever done for them.

At this point a little reminiscence seems called for. More than fifty

years before, I carried a paper route that included the Ohio Penitentiary and delivered some twenty papers to inmates. Under the easy system prevailing at the time, I was permitted to deliver papers direct to the cells. Since I was young and had led a blameless life, I had formed the opinion that a convict was a different kind of person, whose life, in my callow opinion, was entirely different from that of normal people. I decided that they were to be avoided at all cost. Because I did not see any more prisoners for many years and did not think about the matter, my opinion about convicts remained unchanged for a long time.

When I became interested in correctional AA I was thrown into contact with the inside members and the impression gradually grew that they were just people. About this time I began to meet all parolees when they came out of the Ohio Penitentiary and my impression grew to the conviction, indeed, that they were just people. This seems foolish today but it is being recounted just as it occurred. At any rate, it caused me to decide that something more should be done for the inside members upon their release, and I began to think—and to talk to my friends of similar interest—about some organized effort to keep our inside AA members active in our program after their release. This thinking and talking culminated in a meeting of nine Ohio AAs around a dining-room-table on a hot July

night in 1953. From this meeting sprang a plan, now well known as Big Brothers of Alcoholics Anonymous, generally shortened to the BB of AA.



After a lot of talk at this informal meeting it was apparent that all had come to agreement on certain fundamentals. The first of these was that any plan, to be workable, must be simple. (You see, most of those in attendance had heard Dr. Bob's last talk in Cleveland in 1950.) The second fundamental was that the same service should be rendered to all who wanted it. A plan was decided upon and the writer was designated to draw up a written statement of just what was proposed, to be submitted to a meeting to be called in Columbus in August.

On August 9, 1953 seventeen AAs met to put the movement on foot officially. These dedicated people represented all parts of the state; they were from Wooster, Akron, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dayton, To-

ledo, Mansfield, Zanesville, Bowling Green, Newark and Columbus. There was a long, serious and constructive discussion, which ended with the adoption of "Articles of Agreement for the Guidance of Big Brothers of Alcoholics Anonymous." This docu-

ment, which can be written on a single page, has stood the test of time and it is felt by the BB of AA members that its conciseness and simplicity explain, in part, the success of the movement. I quote a few sentences:

EXTRACTS FROM BB OF AA CHARTER

. . . The object will be to provide automatic AA contact for all members of institutional groups who are discharged.

. . . AA members throughout the state of Ohio become BBs of AA by pledging themselves to contact discharges assigned them and introducing them to an AA group. . . .

. . . BB of AA will set up a clearing house with a clerk in charge, who will register BBs, gather information about AA members about to be discharged, and make assignments to AA contacts. Expenses will be

kept at a minimum and no salaries paid. . . .

. . . The clearing house clerk will seek cooperation with all groups and central offices but will deal directly with individual AA members who have become BBs.

. . . Care will be taken at all times to keep BB in the hands of AA, of which it is an integral part. Cooperation . . . will be sought and reciprocated by BB of AA.

. . . Simplicity and anonymity should prevail at all times.

THE PLAN IN OPERATION

With the passage of this charter, without dissent, BB of AA was ready to go to work. One of the first things to be done was to arrange for AA members to be registered as BBs and to set up a plan for obtaining the necessary information about outcoming releasees. The former was handled by mail and by personal interviews on the part of the founders. In no time at all 300 AAs were accepted as BB of AA.

While this was going on there were only two institutions discharging inmates and both of these had interested advisors to the inmate AA groups: Mr. M. J. Koloski of Ohio Penitentiary and Mr. G. E.

Miller of London Prison Farm. These gentlemen (both of whom are now associate wardens) undertook to furnish the required information about parolees—and BB of AA was ready to start operations. A third institution now cooperating in this work is the Marion Correctional Institution, with Mr. E. R. Etter as advisor. Mr. S. M. Patterson is now AA advisor at Ohio Penitentiary and Mr. E. O. Skagon at London Prison Farm.

In the fall of 1953 the first inside members began to come out under the new plan—and BB of AA started to function. A little shaky at first, but it did function. The in-

stitutions furnished data on age, race, marital status, occupation and other information regarded as important, and the clearing house clerk attempted to "match up" parolee and contact.

A lot of educational work needed to be done—both inside and outside the institutions. Some of the boys on the inside figured that BB of AA meant parole sponsors, jobs, loans and general coddling. The inside member had to be told that BB of AA did none of these things as an organization, but that it did offer fellowship and advice on living problems so that material gains could be realized. It had to be explained clearly that BB of AA purposely does not go in for these things but rather contents itself with carrying the message. This approach seems to have paid off in the long run—although the policy must constantly be emphasized because inside zealots, along with a few outsiders, insist that parole sponsorship is a part of our endeavor. Of course, there are no restrictions as such on what individual AAs may do for anyone; but as an organized movement BB of AA is kept simple—and the

simple purpose is to contact released AA members and introduce them to an outside group.

BB of AA believes that in the simplicity of their program lies strength. Some efforts made in other states to help the released AA member have failed. In one state the red carpet was really rolled out for parolees: they were met by a committee who took them to a hotel for lunch, after having an entire new outfit of clothing purchased for them. In another state an elaborate set of rules was adopted, including five pages devoted to procedures for securing loans, which concluded with the information that no funds were available for loan purposes. This state, as well as the one referred to above, has abandoned any assistance for the parolee. In other states methods conceived in AA have been thrown open to the entry of the public in the form of state officials and do-gooders generally so that any identity with AA is lost. BB of AA was set up by AAs for the benefit of AAs, and it has no members except AAs. If anyone in any other category belongs to the BB, it is because he also belongs to AA.

HIGHER % OF AA PAROLEES GET FINAL RELEASE

Before concluding this article I shall quote a few figures. These may be relied upon—they are compiled without consideration for what they will show; accuracy and truth is the object and they are offered with confidence. Including today (August

14, 1957), BB of AA has handled 1070 cases, as follows: 1953—66; 1954—312; 1955—291; 1956—270; 1957 (to date)—131. As far as can be ascertained no other organized effort has any comparable experience. Although we are well aware

that the exact picture varies from day to day, here is the approximate result: 57% of the AA parolees receive a final release, while 45% of the entire Ohio penal population receive a final release. These figures speak for themselves.

In the person of Mr. S. M. Patterson, psychologist and AA advisor at the Ohio Penitentiary, BB of AA has a zealous supporter. Those who know him feel that AA and BB of AA form perhaps his most devoted interest, outside of his family. He knows as many AAs as anyone in Ohio, is in demand as a speaker at many AA gatherings, and attended the Yale School of Alcoholic Studies in 1956.

Writing in an Ohio official publication, Mr. Patterson said in part: "Most of us engaged in serious work in the field of alcoholism and crime are of the opinion that the AA program in the correctional institution offers a unique and highly specialized type of treatment resource in the re-socialization of incarcerated alcoholic and problem drinkers. Prior to the inception of correctional AA and BB of AA in Ohio, inmates diagnosed as alcoholic were considered more or less hopeless and approximately 80% were returned as parolee violators, largely due to drinking and consequential acts. This figure has been reduced to 42% and, as methods and procedures improve, the prognosis is bright indeed. When correctional AA was introduced at the Ohio

Penitentiary it was not long before a weak spot was detected in our procedure. It was found that, fol-



lowing release, a parolee was very reluctant to seek membership in a new and outside group. As a result most of the effort to teach them the AA program in prison was wasted. The Big Brothers of Alcoholics Anonymous (BB of AA) came into being in 1953 to fill this need and to insure that 'every released member of an inside group who desires outside help from AA shall have it.' That this was a step in the right direction is indicated by the fact that since the founding of BB of AA, the number of alcoholic parolees who have made the grade on parole has increased approximately thirty percent. We have learned not to be overly concerned about 'failures' but rather to concentrate on our improved ratio of 'successes.' The indisputable fact remains that, due to the effort of

BB of AA many, many more alcoholic felons are remaining in good standing in their respective communities, and this, in our humble opinion, represents the only kind of progress worth discussing."

Anyone familiar with correctional AA work recognizes the enthusiasm of the inside members. Latent talents come to the fore, the meeting room is decorated, beautiful signs are made and publications are written, edited and printed or mimeographed. Many other constructive things are done—and all these abilities come out with the inmate when he leaves the institution; they have been factors in successful careers. Several groups can testify that the boys from the inside have married the belles of their groups.

Some of the successes have been outstanding, but so have some of the failures. Like Mr. Patterson, we have learned "to concentrate on our improved ratio of successes."

An inside member (who edits the Ohio Penitentiary Eye-Opener) describes BB of AA: "A unique group that has but one purpose: to assist the alcoholic felon become re-established in society after his release from prison ... not seeking praise or glory, certainly no compensation other than, perhaps, the personal satisfaction that they were helping their fellowman with more than lip-service. For this group is not content with talk—they must have action, and they do so by making contact with alcoholic-parolees,

taking them to meetings, introducing them as those wanting to do something about their drinking problem, with never any reference made to their having been inmates of a penal institution. . . . We humbly and gratefully salute the Big Brothers of Alcoholics Anonymous, who carry this message into penal AA: we want you and need you just as we hope you do us."

ANNUAL FALL CONFERENCE

BB of AA meets twice a year—an annual Conference in October and what is called a committee meeting in April. For the last few years the April committee meeting has held a session with the Ohio Penitentiary AA group with large, enthusiastic state-wide attendance. The Fifth Annual Conference will be held this year in Cincinnati on October 13.

Many inquiries have been received about the workings of BB of AA. At first, personal letters were written in reply, but when the load became too heavy, mimeographed material was prepared—and it has gone all over the world. Information reaches the office that the BB of AA plan has proved successful elsewhere. BB of AA is a simple program for simple people to be of service to a segment of AA membership who are undergoing an important change in their environment. God has chosen to grant it a measure of success.

Anon., Columbus, Ohio.