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I Won the Boxing Gloves (and the Big Book)

*An ex-delegate's story
of 20 years' AA service*

MY initial contact with AA was through a doctor called to attend me who pronounced my condition as the "latter stage of acute alcoholism." He doubted that he could save my life, but was willing to try provided I would stop drinking. He stated emphatically that I couldn't do it on my own, but that AA might help. That was February 28, 1946. I have not had a drink since.

Among the very few pieces of AA literature available when I first came were reprints of some Grapevine articles Bill had written (which later became the body of our Twelve Traditions). I read these reprints and liked what Bill had to say. The more I studied the articles the more I seemed to understand why the group I was attending was having so many problems. The old-

timers there were not following Bill's suggestions and they sure wouldn't listen to me, a newcomer, when I tried to talk to them about his ideas. As a result of those arguments, before I was one year sober, I started a group in my neighboring home town so I could run it right!

By that time the original Twelve Traditions pamphlet had been published and we obtained enough copies to give one to each group member. We were determined to follow the Traditions and, among other things, scheduled a group business meeting, on a night other than our regular AA meeting so our members could truly run the group based upon the voice of the group conscience. As "founder" I tried to tell the members what the "voice" of the group was and they literally beat some AA sense into my head with

those Twelve Traditions pamphlets.

The next phase of my AA service experience came when my group sent me to represent them on our local Central (Inter-group) Committee. At that time each group in the area was sending a representative, and I became the 120th member of the committee. That fiasco reminds me of words in a GSO film-strip about our literature, "Just imagine any fifteen AA members you know agreeing upon a single page of anything about AA and you know why it may take many months to prepare one pamphlet." So it was with our 120 member Central Committee — we had personality clashes galore. Fortunately none of us "bleeding Deacons" bled to death, and our central office survived in spite of our hassles.

Restudying the Twelve Traditions pamphlet and using administrative experience of the past, I put together a suggested plan for restructuring our Central Committee. The plan called for creating districts throughout our area, having Group Representatives within each district meet together and select from among themselves one to act as District Chairman. The several District Chairmen would then meet as a Central Committee and be a small enough group to be effective.

The old-timers really screamed at this newcomer's audacity in trying to tell them what to do. One guy told me I wasn't even an alcoholic and should get out. I quickly saw

his problem and told him he ought to get drunk so he could come back as a newcomer and learn something.

I topped that by writing a fifteen page letter to the Committee, detailing how that guy was not only violating every Tradition, but not working the Steps, either; recommending that he be kicked out for the good of the movement.

Before mailing the letter, I wanted my sponsor to be the first to read it and to see how smart I was. My sponsor read the letter, then after several minutes of, for me, uncomfortable silence said, "You sure wrote yourself a letter, didn't you Bud?" And so I had. My first written inventory! Everything I'd charged to the old-timer was really one of my own shortcomings. A continuing written inventory is still very necessary for me. (Of course, I didn't mail *that* letter.)

About a year later the Central Committee was reorganized using the essence of my suggested plan, but providentially they changed the "Districts" to "Zones" and the plan has seemed to work fairly well.

I say "providentially" because shortly after that, Bill came out to talk to us about something called Third Legacy which would require us to divide our area into "districts." Most of us didn't know what Bill was talking about, partly because we didn't know what the first two legacies were. Our First Legacy was the AA Book containing the program of personal recovery. Our

Second Legacy was the Twelve Traditions embodying the personal program for group unity. The Third Legacy was the transfer of the founders' personal responsibility for World Services. Look at the AA emblem: a triangle within a circle. The three sides of the triangle represent RECOVERY, UNITY and SERVICE. The circle indicates to me these three are inseparable. Without any one of them the other two might soon be lost.

By 1950 we had our first election for a General Service Delegate. Many of us believed we understood the reason for the Third Legacy Plan. Dr. Bob was gone; we knew Bill was perishable and besides, no two or three people could possibly maintain contact with the hundreds of groups throughout the country and properly carry their wishes to the General Service Board. Such linkage simply had to be forged; failure to do so might have been the death of AA.

It was then I came to realize the importance of learning the history of AA. Without knowing what had gone before, how could I possibly assume my responsibility to AA now and in the future?

The best single source of that history is the book, *AA Comes of Age*, one of the most exciting books I've yet read. And don't overlook the *Third Legacy Manual* and *Twelve Concepts for World Service*, vital AA literature for every AA member.

In 1947 a move to start a club in

our area took shape. I was among those who aided the Committee and became a charter member. I served a couple of terms on the Board of Directors and was later given the dubious honor of serving as club President and Chairman of the Board. That club has since been dissolved; not because it was mismanaged, but because it was no longer needed by enough people to be supported properly. And that seems to be the key to an AA service. Is it needed? If it is, then provide it we must. Conversely, when a service is no longer needed, personal feelings must not interfere with our responsibility to drop it.

That is one reason for the Tradition which suggests outside aids of genuine use to AA should be separately incorporated and managed. The groups can quickly drop support if such aids become useless or interfere in basic AA work.

During my term on our local Central Committee it was my privilege to assist in the formation of our area's first Institutional Coordinating Committee. Several of our more responsible members had been conducting meetings in various institutions around the area before I got sober. We became aware of

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the need to coordinate those meetings when newer members, who knew nothing of the existing institutional efforts, attempted to "start" AA where in fact it was already going well. We began a listing of the institutional groups, a contact name or two for each, and from that simple beginning our present effective Institutional Committee evolved.

In 1950 my group selected me to be their General Service Representative (GSR). I took part in the election of our first delegate and attended all his assembly meetings, sincerely trying to carry the message of World Service to my group. In the Spring of 1952, after the General Service Conference, our delegate asked for suggestions on how we could better carry the story of World Service to all AA members in our area. I suggested that we have a conference in the L. A. area to talk about services. The suggestion was accepted, and, as usually happens, you offer a good idea and you are appointed chairman of the committee to get it done. By the time we had our second planning session, AAs in several cities outside the L. A. area indicated they wanted to take part also.

Thus it became a Southern Cali-

fornia Conference and the first one was held in Long Beach in November in 1952. We had a lot to learn. The So. Cal. Panel One Assembly was tied into that affair for a couple of years, but we cut that out when we realized that So. Cal. Panel Two people were also at the Conference and weren't much interested in our hassles with delegate elections. As I recall, we didn't get around to talking much about World Services until 1960. Since then World Service meetings have been an important part of our annual conclave, now more properly called convention. That name change was made because too many of our people confuse it with the General Service Conference meeting held in New York each April.

During the 1950-1951 period, I got the idea I'd like to have the Twelve Steps and short form of the Twelve Traditions in each piece of AA literature as a convenience when making Twelfth Step calls. I talked to my group members about that during one of our business meetings. They liked the idea, so I took it on to the Area Assembly meeting, where it was again endorsed. Our delegate took the idea to the 1952 General Service Con-

ference; the Conference liked it and since then all Conference approved literature has contained the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

I made a small map of our area and a service structure chart in 1952, which I often used when sharing my experience with others. In 1955 our delegate asked me to prepare a large map of our area. (The Third Legacy Manual suggests that you cannot properly conduct an assembly without one, but we had ignored that suggestion for five years.) The map was prepared and it was a great source of further AA service education for me. In 1960 that map was lost and I was again asked to prepare one. I became known as the guy who loved maps.

In 1962 I again served as a GSR and was selected as District Chairman. In 1963-64 it was my priv-

ilege to serve as delegate for my area. The outgoing delegate suggested that the five California delegates should have a sharing session, so I wrote them all and we started a delegates meeting which has now become an annual get-together, held during the Spring Conference of the Northern California Council. This is a valuable aid in having well-informed servants at the April General Service Conference.

At the 1963 General Service Conference, my first one, I was almost obsessed with the desire to speak on every subject brought to the floor; a real "mike" hog. At the end of each Conference, the man and woman delegate adjudged to have contributed most to the Conference are presented with an AA Book inscribed by Bill. I was given a special award: a pair of boxing gloves! I believe they said, "to pro-

tect his hands when he grabs the microphone."

After returning home, my wife Janet, a staunch member of Al-Anon, showed me an article written by Admiral Rickover, which contained a prayer I've since adopted. It goes like this, "Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject. Release me from craving to straighten out everyone's affairs. With my vast store of wisdom and experience, it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end."

My complete lack of humility permits me to tell you that after the 1964 Conference I was the man delegate given the AA Book inscribed by Bill. I've permission of my former assembly members to retain custody of that Book for them. They really earned the Book,

they taught me to be a trusted servant. (I keep the boxing gloves with the Book, as an important reminder.)

This sharing of my experience is not meant to impress you with my excellence as a servant. Conversely, many who have been in AA less time than I served much more. Rather, I hope my story may move *you* to doing those things that need doing without waiting for "them" to do something. Remember, World Service isn't "them," World Service is *you!* Millions of drunks will die without ever hearing the message of AA if we do not assume our responsibility for AA's World Service. I realize that not every AA member can have the opportunity to serve in all phases of AA service work, but each of us can "light one candle rather than curse the dark." We can become *responsible*.

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