

June 1966

In Remembrance of "Ebby"

by Bill

IN his seventieth year, and on the twenty-first of March, my friend and sponsor "Ebby" passed beyond our sight and hearing.

On a chill November afternoon in 1934 it was Ebby who had brought me the message that saved my life. Still more importantly, he was the bearer of the Grace and of the principles that shortly afterward led to my spiritual awakening. This was truly a call to new life in the Spirit. It was the kind of rebirth that has since become the most precious possession of each and all of us.

As I looked upon him where he lay in perfect repose, I was stirred by poignant memories of all the years I had known and loved him.

There were recollections of those joyous days in a Vermont boarding school. After the war years we were sometimes together, then drinking of course. Alcohol, we thought, was the solvent for all difficulties, a

veritable elixir for good living.

Then there was that absurd episode of 1929. Ebby and I were on an all-night spree in Albany. Suddenly we remembered that a new airfield had been constructed in Vermont, on a pasture near my own home town. The opening day was close at hand. Then came the intoxicating thought: If only we could hire a plane we'd beat the opening by several days, thus making aviation history ourselves! Forthwith, Ebby routed a pilot friend out of bed, and for a stiff price we engaged him and his small craft. We sent the town father a wire announcing the time of our arrival. In midmorning, we took to the air, greatly elated — and very tight.

Somehow our rather tipsy pilot set us down on the field. A large crowd, including the village band and a welcoming committee, lustily cheered his feat. The pilot then de-

planed. But nothing else happened, nothing at all. The onlookers stood in puzzled silence. Where were Ebby and Bill? Then the horrible discovery was made — we were both slumped in the rear cockpit of the plane, completely passed out! Kind friends lifted us down and stood us upon the ground. Whereupon we history-makers fell flat on our faces. Ignominously, we had to be carted away. The fiasco could not have been more appalling. We spent the next day shakily writing apologies.

Over the following five years, I seldom saw Ebby. But of course our drinking went on and on. In late 1934 I got a terrific jolt when I learned that Ebby was about to be locked up, this time in a state mental hospital.

Following a series of mad sprees, he had run his father's new Packard off the road and into the side of a dwelling, smashing right into its kitchen, and just missing a terrified housewife. Thinking to ease this rather awkward situation, Ebby summoned his brightest smile and said, "Well, my dear, how about a cup of coffee?"

Of course Ebby's lighthearted humor was quite lost on everyone concerned. Their patience worn thin, the town fathers yanked him into court. To all appearances, Ebby's final destination was the insane asylum. To me, this marked the end of the line for us both. Only a short time before, my physician, Dr. Silkworth, had felt obliged to tell Lois

there was no hope of my recovery; that I, too, would have to be confined, else risk insanity or death.

But Providence would have it otherwise. It was presently learned that Ebby had been paroled into the custody of friends who (for the time being) had achieved their sobriety in the Oxford Groups. They brought Ebby to New York where he fell under the benign influence of AA's great friend-to-be, Dr. Sam Shoemaker, the rector of Calvary Episcopal Church. Much affected by Sam and the "O. G." Ebby promptly sobered up. Hearing of my serious condition, he had straight-way come to our house in Brooklyn.

As I continued to recollect, the vision of Ebby looking at me across our kitchen table became wonderfully vivid. As most AAs know, he spoke to me of the release from hopelessness that had come to him (through the Oxford Groups) as the result of self-survey, restitution, outgoing helpfulness to others, and prayer. In short, he was proposing the attitudes and principles that I used later in developing AA's Twelve Steps to recovery.

It had happened. One alcoholic had effectively carried the message to another. Ebby had been enabled to bring me the gift of Grace because he could reach me at depth through the language of the heart. He had pushed ajar that great gate through which all in AA have since passed to find their freedom under God.