

**A Society  
of  
Alcoholics  
in  
Action  
in  
New Zealand**



# **How the AA Message was Carried**

The growth and development  
of the AA Service Structure  
in New Zealand  
1946-1976

First Edition 1985

Second Edition

Copyright 1987 NZ General Service Conference of AA

Third Edition

Copyright 1999 NZ General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous (Inc.)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in any retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior written permission of the New Zealand General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous (Inc.).

ISBN 0-473-00283-3

A Society of Alcoholics in Action in New Zealand Copyright ©1999

New Zealand General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous (Inc.)

PO Box 6458

Wellington, New Zealand

Printed by:

Typeset by Holistic Solutions Design

This is New Zealand General Service Conference Approved Literature

# Contents

Acknowledgements .....	
Preamble	
Introduction	
Chapter 1	The Beginnings
Chapter 2	Early Members, 1946-1950
Chapter 3	Early Groups, 1951 - 1956
Chapter 4	The Groups Coming Together, 1957-1960
Chapter 5	Mainstay
Chapter 6	The Service Council Part 1, 1960-1964
Chapter 7	The Service Council Part 2, 1965-1976
Chapter 8	A Doctor Looks at AA, Dr Fraser McDonald
Chapter 9	Alanon Family Groups in New Zealand
Chapter 10	AA and the National Society on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence – Roy Johnston
The Twelve Steps	
The Twelve Traditions	
Appendices:	
1	The First New Zealand Conference of AA
2	Conference Resolutions
3	Plan of Services
4	AA Publications that Aid Co-operation
5	Interview with Eve M. of New York, 1966
6	Service – The Third Legacy
7	The Twelve Steps in Maori
Notes	



To the memory of

**Bobbie B.**

Who, as Ian's sponsor, was there  
at the beginning





## Acknowledgements

- Dr Tom Maling for permission to use his address to the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner, Massey University, 2 February 1976, and for editing it for publication.
- The National Society on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence New Zealand Inc. for the paper AA presented by Dr Fraser McDonald to the 1977 Summer School of Alcoholic Studies, Massey University.
- Challenge Weekly, for use of material from their article, 'Polynesians Given Sobriety Message'.
- The Very Reverend Dr. L.M.McFerran (Father Mack) who sent his recollections of his time as a non-AA member of the NZ General Service Conference of AA all the way from White Horse, Yukon. Free access to his MA thesis *Saved by the Net – Alcoholics Anonymous, A Social Network for Rehabilitation*, University of Auckland, 1971, is also acknowledged.
- Frequent recourse has been made to Alcoholics World Services, Inc. publications. Extracts from the following have been reprinted by permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.:  
*The Twelve Steps; The Twelve Traditions; The Preamble; The Serenity Prayer; The Toronto Declaration; AA's Legacy of Service* by Bill W.; *AA Comes of Age*, 1979; *Guidelines*, Vol.26, No.4, Aug-Sept 1981; *The AA Way of Life* by Bill W., 1967; *How AA Members Co-operate with other Community efforts to help Alcoholics*, 1974; *AA 30 A Book About AA's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year and International Convention*, 1965.

Where the quotation appears in the text, reference is made to the Notes for each chapter.

## **Preamble**

Alcoholics Anonymous<sup>®</sup> is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

- The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.
- AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organisation or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.
- Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

Copyright © by The AA Grapevine, Inc.  
reprinted with permission

## Introduction

In 1972 Ian McE., the first person in New Zealand to recover from the disease of alcoholism through Alcoholics Anonymous, was asked by the members to write the history of the fellowship. Ian agreed, but ill health forced a postponement of the project. Later, with Ian's help, the work was begun again and much of the material in the early chapters is based upon his taped recollections and notes.

Little did Ian know when he wrote to New York in January 1946 for information about AA that he was to spend most of his time over the next 30 years fostering the growth of the fellowship. The following story is a tribute to his work.

Over the last few years, AA has encouraged and appointed voluntary archivists in the regions who are now collecting, recording and organising personal recollections and group histories before the passage of time removes forever the early members of the fellowship which, of necessity and by nature, eschews written records. Where group histories are included they are illustrative, and not exhaustive, accounts of the way in which the message was carried, often at considerable personal sacrifice.

# Chapter 1

## The Beginnings

The essence of the fellowship is expressed in the encounter between one sober alcoholic and another still suffering from the disease of alcoholism – an event which takes place within the context of a simple organisation framework.

Firstly, why service? Why does the fellowship of AA place such emphasis on this concept? And what does it mean in practice? The answers to these questions are best given by Bill W., the co-founder of AA, in the AA Service Manual:

*“Our Twelfth Step – carrying the message – is the basic service that the AA Fellowship gives; this is the principal aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, AA is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves wither and those who haven’t been given the truth may die.*

*“Hence, an AA service is anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer – ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to AA’s General Service Office for national and international action. The sum total of all these services is our Third Legacy of Service.*

*“Services include meeting places, hospital co-operation, and intergroup offices; they mean pamphlets, books, and good publicity of almost every description. They call for committees, delegates, trustees, and conferences. And, not to be forgotten, they need voluntary money contributions from within the Fellowship.*

*“These services, whether performed by individuals, groups, areas, or AA as a whole, are utterly vital to our existence and growth. Nor can we make AA more simple by abolishing such services. We would only be asking for complication and confusion.*

*“Concerning any given service, we therefore pose but one question: ‘Is this service really needed?’ If it is, then we maintain it we must, or fail in our mission to those who need and seek AA”.<sup>1</sup>*

In this introductory chapter we describe AA itself, the influences which gave it shape and the people whose insights and encouragement made it possible for the American co-founders, Bill W. and Dr Bob to first find

their own sobriety and then lead the way for hundreds of thousands after them to recover from the ravages of alcoholism.

Whilst AA sees its founding moment\* as 10 June 1935<sup>2</sup> when Dr Bob had his last drink, other events led up to and gave significance to that occasion. The last person to play a part was Carl Jung, the great psychiatrist practising in Zurich, Switzerland in the early 1930s. He had as a patient a young man, Rowland H., a person of considerable ability and wealth. After a year of treatment for alcoholism, Rowland left Zurich in 1932. He soon returned, his condition unimproved. It was then that Carl Jung told his patient, "There might be hope for recovery, if (the alcoholic) could undergo a transforming experience of the spirit"<sup>3</sup>. On his return to New York, Rowland found such an experience in the Oxford Groups.<sup>4</sup>

He attended the uNited States Headquarters of the movement, at the Calvary Episcopal Church of Rev. Dr Samuel Shoemaker, who was later to become one of AA's most influential and important friends.<sup>5</sup> Whilst the Oxford Groups themselves were not particularly involved with helping alcoholics,<sup>6</sup> Rowland saw an opportunity to pass on his own experiences and, in August 1934, went bail for and led and old friend, Ebby T., into the movement just as the latter was to be shut away in an instituion because of his drinking. Ebby 'got the message' and, in the first flush of enthusiasm, turned to help the most hopeless drunk he knew, Bill W., an old boarding sschool friend. This meeting between Ebby T. and Bill was another founding moment in AA. Whilst Bill could not, at this point, accept the religious aspect of Ebby's message, two things stuck in his mind – here was 'hopeless' Ebby looking wonderful, and, after mentioning God once, he referred more often to 'another power' or a 'higher power' – one could choose one's own concept of 'God'.<sup>7</sup>

Bill, who was in the middle of what was to be his last bender, decided to follow up the Oxford Groups himself but was first admitted to Towns Hospital, Manhattan in order to dry out. Ebby visited again, this time bringing with him a copy of William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*. From this book Bill gained another insight central to AA's philosophy. As he was to recall later:<sup>8</sup>

*"It was rather difficult reading for me, but I devoured it from cover to cover. Spiritual experiences, James thought, could have objective reality; almost like gifts from the blue, they could transform people. Some were sudden brilliant illuminations; others came on very gradually. Some flowed out of religious channels; others did not. But nearly all had the great common denominators of pain, suffering, calamity. Complete*

\* The phrase 'founding moments' was coined by Ernest Kurtz to describe the confluence of events and perceptions making up the philosophy of AA.

*hopelessness and deflation at depth were almost always required to make the recipient ready. The significance of all this burst upon me. Deflation at depth – yes, that was it. Exactly that had happened to me. Dr Carl Jung had told an Oxford Group firend of Ebby’s how hopeless his alcoholism was and Dr Silkworth had passed the same sentence upon me. Then Ebby, also an alcoholic, had handed me the identical dose. On Dr Silkworth’s say-so alone maybe I would never have completely accepted the verdict, but when Ebby came along and one alcoholic began to talk to another, that clinched it.*

*“My thoughts began to race as I envisaged a chain reaction among alcoholics, one carrying the message and these principles to the next. More than I could ever want anyhting else, I now knew that I wanted to work with other alcoholics.*

*“In the kinship of common suffering, one alcoholic had been talking to another.”<sup>9</sup>*

There remained one more element to complete the understanding of the recovery process later to become the AA programme; the contribution of Dr W.D.Silkworth. Bill had been admitted four times between 1933 and 1934 to the Charles B. Towns Hospital, a private institution specialising in alcoholism and drug dependency, where Dr Silkworth was medical director. It was the doctor who introduced Bill to the concept of alcoholism as a disease – a pathological craving. ‘An obsession of the mind that condemns one to drink and an allergy of the body that condemns one to die.’ From Dr Silkworth Bill had learned that his ‘was a hopeless, progressive, irreversible case of alcoholism – an obsession that condemned him to drink against his will, and an allergy-like sensitivity to alcohol.’<sup>9</sup> It was Dr Silkworth too, who pointed out to Bill when he later began working with other alcoholics using the Oxford Group concepts, that his lack of success came about through plugging the four absolutes<sup>4</sup> too ealry, which frightened people away. Better, he said, to remember the message from Carl Jung through Rowland to Ebby – “deflate those tough egos deep down; tell them the medical bit and give it to them hard. Only then can you begin to try out your other medicine, the ethical principals you have picked up from the Oxford Groups.”<sup>10</sup>

The chance to put these new insights into practice soon came. Stranded in Akron, Ohio on 11 May 1935 after losing a company proxy fight, which, if successful, would have put him back on Wall Street, Bill W. turned for help to the only people he knew might help him in a strange city – the Oxford Groupers. Through the Rev. Mr Walter Tunks, Bill spoke on the telephone to a non-alcoholic member of the Oxford Groups, Mrs Henrietta Seiberling. With her help a meeting was arranged for the next day with a prominent Akron surgeon, Dr Bob, and the two met for the first time at

the gatehouse of the Seiberling estate. Through alcohol, Dr Bob's career was on the rocks. Over the next few weeks he and Bill shared their experiences to such good effect that Dr Bob took his last drink on 10 June 1935, the date which AA sees as its founding time.<sup>11</sup>

AA did not completely sever its links with the Oxford Group until the northern summer of 1939. There was much in the Oxford Group's programme which proved unacceptable to AAs; at the same time there is a freely acknowledged debt to that movement.<sup>12</sup>

In 1961 Bill W. and Carl Jung exchanged letters, published, slightly edited for the fellowship in *The AA Grapevine* of January 1963 and 1968. In these letters both writers agreed on the substance of Carl Jung's advice to Rowland H. In Bill's words, "the conversation between you (and Rowland) . . . was to become the first link in the chain of events that led to the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous." Two points were made to Jung's patient, "first of all, you frankly told him of his hopelessness, so far as any further medical or psychiatric treatment might be concerned." Secondly, Jung had talked of "a spiritual or religious experience – in short, a genuine conversation," pointing out at the same time, "that while such experiences had sometimes brought recovery to alcoholics, they were . . . comparatively rare."<sup>13</sup>

## Chapter 2

### 1946 to 1950

#### Early members scattered throughout New Zealand

Our story covers the thirty years from 1946 to 1976. It is appropriate to begin and end with the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner, when the fellowship paused to celebrate the achievements of the past. Ian McE., the first person in New Zealand to achieve sobriety through the AA programme, spoke to the gathering:<sup>1</sup>

*“I think it would be appropriate tonight if I repeated the story of how AA was brought to me. It is a simple story of what happened. In 1945 I was living with my wife and our our family in Richmond, Nelson. I had one of those wives who is most common amongst alcoholics, who stuck to me through thick and thin, and some of it was pretty thin, too. I was the son of well-to-do parents who tried everyhting to help me with my problem as I gradually slipped into the grip of alcohol. I was, at one time, committed to ‘The Island’\* for a year. This treatment was only abstention and was quite ineffective. Within two months of returning to civilisation I was back drinking again, as is the common story of alcoholics.*

*“At Richmond we were running a small citrus farm. When I first came off the island, I got the idea that going to the country to do some farming might help me to get rid of my trouble. How I thought this would help I really don’t know. It was just that farmers were a better sort of people from the average and, of course, they would not be alcoholic. But I was to find, to my surprise, that they made very good alcoholics.*

*“In 1945, I had been an active alcoholic for some 20 years and our situation at home, and, of course, on the farm, was like any alcoholic’s.*

*“One day I went to Nelson, as was my custom, and I went the rounds of the pubs and down to one of my favourite places and had a session*

<sup>1</sup> Rotoroa Island



there. In those days I was a very big man, some 18 stone, and when I got tired and sleepy, I passed out. Although I was not a fighting drunk, I was quite a problem to move.

*“At this stage, for some reason which I don’t understand at all, I walked out of this pub and up to the local psychiatric hospital. I found the Superintendent sitting on the verandah, which was unusual for him – he was a very busy man – but he knew me and he knew the family and again, for some reason which I don’t quite understand, I asked to be admitted. He was not very keen on this. Of course, as you know, to be admitted as a voluntary patient you are supposed to be in a state to make a sensible decision. Anyway, he rang my wife and, I didn’t know this for some months after, he said to her, ‘Ian’s here, he wants to come in. What shall I do?’ and she said, ‘If you can get him, grab him!’ And so I was admitted as a voluntary patient. I had never been in a hospital of this sort before, either as a visitor or as a patient, and I had all the usual prejudices against them, and the only treatment they could give me was to sober me up and get me working round the place.”*

Ian recalled:

*“One day I was in the reading room and I picked up a copy of the Readers’ Digest<sup>2</sup> and read an article called ‘Maybe You Can Do It Too’ by Edward McGoldrick<sup>3</sup> who had been an alcoholic and had recovered through the help of an organisation known as Alcoholics Anonymous.*

*“I was able to identify with McGoldrick from this article as I had never identified with before. Of course, I had been told that I was just a drunk for years and years, and the idea of the disease concept of alcoholism was not known in New Zealand at that time.”*

Ian continues...

*“I was able to see that I was exactly like him. I drank like he did. I thought like he did. And he had recovered and recommended that anybody in this situation who was wanting help should get in touch with Alcoholics Anonymous. So this I did.”<sup>4</sup>*

Ian was able to write directly as the address of Alcoholics Anonymous – PO Box 459, Grand Central Annex, New York – was given at the foot of the article. In his letter to New York, sent from Richmond, Nelson on 3 January 1946, Ian took the first step to his own recovery and Alcoholics Anonymous in New Zealand was born.

In his letter Ian did two things now known to be essential to recovery – firstly, he acknowledged that he was an alcoholic; “I have been an alcoholic for the past ten years and all efforts to date have failed to cure the habit.” and secondly, he asked for help. Ian traced the history of his efforts to get

well; "I went to England in 1938 and was treated by injections at the Institute of Endocrinology and had many interviews with a neurologist without producing any permanent result." Ian also described his efforts to get to Edward McGoldrick's Bureau in New York only to be thwarted when "advice finally came through . . . that at the present time this could not be arranged as the bureau was a part of the New York Welfare Department and only dealt with certain cases through the N.Y. courts." Ian's letter was replied to by Bobbie B., secretary of the General Service Office of AA, New York on 1 March 1946 and there began a remarkable correspondence over the next ten years which helped to keep Ian sober whilst AA in New Zealand grew slowly around him. The staff in New York changed over the years but the sustaining, supporting letters continued, each writer picking up without a break where the other had left off.

In her first reply Bobbie told Ian about AA; how it was avocational except for the small National Headquarters in New York – "Our 725 groups throughout the world are run by the members themselves." She enclosed a reprint of Jack Alexander's article<sup>5</sup> and sent, under separate cover, other literature, "which will give you a clear idea of AA and how it works." Bobbie went on to say, "if you are sincerely interested in finding a solution to your problem, I see no reason why you cannot practice AA even as far away as New Zealand. We have been successful in helping people in Honolulu and Australia, in fact, we have two groups in Australia now. This was built up simply through a few alcoholics who recovered themselves through AA and then helped others."

Not once, but a number of times, a well researched article in a mass circulation periodical has had a profound effect on the movement. This has happened both here and in America. By the spring of 1941 AA had 2,000 members in the United States. Following this, came overnight national recognition with the publication of a feature article in the Saturday Evening Post written by Jack Alexander. "As soon as the article appeared, 6,000 frantic enquiries hit our New York Post Office. Jack's piece made Alcoholics Anonymous a national institution."<sup>6</sup> This article, reprinted many times by AA as a pamphlet, and still used today, was the one chosen by Bobbie B. to send to Ian in the first letter to him from New York.

It was Bobbie, also, who "for several years faced almost single-handed the huge aftermath of group problems that followed the wake of Jack Alexander's article. Writing thousands of letters to struggling individuals and wobbly new groups, she made all the difference during that time when it seemed very uncertain that AA would hang together at all."<sup>7</sup> No sign of the strain of this time shows in her caring, thoughtful letters to Ian. On 17 May, 1946, Bobbie wrote to Ian, "I'm delighted that our AA program seems to hit the nail on the head for you . . . don't for one moment let it

discourage you to think you are all alone in New Zealand. Eleven years ago Bill Wilson was all alone in the world with just an idea for sobriety and not too much faith that it would work." Bobbie forwarded by surface mail lists of all the groups in the world and suggested that Ian write to Bill O'. in Sydney, the AA secretary there. When writing again to Bobbie at a later date (17 August, 1946), Ian reported the receipt of a long letter from Bill. Thus began Ian's wide correspondence with AA's in New Zealand and many part of the world. Sometimes he was given the address of a new group in another country and was encouraged to share with them his own experience in starting out alone. Bobby also wrote, "we are putting a star on our map today for New Zealand and you are 'it'. This simply means that we consider you our AA representative for Richmond, New Zealand and when we get any enquiries from people in your vicinity, we will ask you to follow them up." Ian felt very good about this.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note that, whilst the correspondence between Ian and G.S.O. went air-mail, Bobbie was unable to enclose any literature which made the letter heavier than half-an-ounce. Everything else had to go by surface. At this time, with great pressure on the New York office, many groups, preoccupied with their own affairs, could not, or did not, help with central finances, and the meagre budget was stretched to carry the message to isolated alcoholics in other places.<sup>9</sup> By the time Ian wrote to New York it had been proved that AA principles could be transmitted by mail. There was initial uncertainty, "maybe AA was just a Yankee gadget that would be no good for Ireland, England, Holland, Scandinavia, Australia or the Pacific."<sup>10</sup>

AA began in New Zealand just as the American members were getting their house in order after the chaotic growth which followed publication of Jack Alexander's article. The service to the society as a whole – the printing of pamphlets, distribution of the Big Book, the answering of pleas for help, responses to requests for guidance on group problems and the working through to a coherent public relations policy had built up both a wealth of experience and a simple organisational structure."

AA started in Ireland in 1946; in England the beginnings were made in 1947; and, nearer to home, Australia could boast two members by late 1944.<sup>12</sup> Ian had become a link in an international movement.

There were real fears that quarrels over leadership, money and membership would place such a strain on the fellowship that it might collapse. Drinking alcoholics are not noted for their stability or confidence in making lasting relationships. Whilst membership would bring some measure of calm to otherwise erratic individuals, a way had to be found for them to somehow learn to live and work together. AA unity was crucial and would come about through shared experience. The solution was to set down in book

form the way in which the programme worked. When the membership of AA was only 100 people, all in America, the so-called Big Book<sup>13</sup> *Alcoholics Anonymous* was written. The foreword to the first edition states, "We of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than 100 men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book. For them, we hope these pages will prove so convincing that no further authentication will be necessary."

The book gave Ian his blueprint for recovery and he spent almost two years in Nelson reading and working the programme before work with others began to bear fruit. The first edition told the stories of twenty-eight alcoholics who had recovered through AA. The authors had felt the need to "produce evidence in the form of living proof, written testimonials of our membership itself. It was felt also that the story section could identify us with the distant reader in a way that the text itself might not."<sup>14</sup> Ian recalled: "In this book I was further able to identify with being an alcoholic, and particularly with one of the case histories."<sup>15</sup>

The book was published in 1939 and was to be Ian's constant companion for the rest of his life. Pat Mc., writing in the September 1976 issue of *The AA Grapevine* recounts the impact it had on both Ian and the development of AA in New Zealand. Bobbie had written<sup>16</sup>, "One of our Trustees who has lived and travelled extensively in New Zealand is particularly interested in the start of AA in your country. He has asked me to send you a book with his compliments." This was the Big Book and Ian's copy received such constant use over the years that it fell apart, and rather than part with it, a bookbinder made repairs.

On 16 July 1946, Ian wrote to Bobbie, "this morning I've had one of my bluest mornings. I thought I couldn't hang out, but with the aid of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* and a little prayer the day looked fine and I thought a letter to you to start with would be a good idea." Ian described a disastrous trip north when he had a slip on the way and had to crawl back home feeling defeated. There waiting for him, was the Big Book, a bundle of pamphlets and a letter from Bobbie in which she said, "for a little while I shall probably have to be the AA (member) who will act as your sponsor. A sponsor usually has many privileges like those of taking his friend to AA meetings and introducing him personally to the programme. We'll have to do this by mail and has been done before so we know it works – Good Luck!"<sup>17</sup>

Ian always wrote to Bobbie when he felt low just as alcoholics telephone, write or go and talk to another alcoholic when tensions rise. Bobbie's responses were so perceptive and answered his needs so accurately, for a

long time he suspected that his wife Heather was also writing behind his back!<sup>18</sup>

Over the years Ian wrote thousands of letters to AA's all over New Zealand. Early members were widely scattered. The first gathering was held at Ian's little farm at Wakefield during Easter (25-30 March) 1948 when five members spent time together. They came from different parts of New Zealand; from Auckland in the north to Dunedin in the south. But such gatherings were rare.

Money was short and many times Ian spoke of the difficulty he had in getting enough cash together to make an important trip. The solution was to make and maintain links by letter. One AA member, writing in 1977, recalled his first letter from Ian, who was his sponsor, which he had received in 1952:

*"In reply to your inquiry regarding AA, I enclose some literature on our approach to the problem. AA is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help each other to recover from alcoholism. AA believes that no one can stop a man from drinking if he does not want to – our experience is that no matter how bad a man has become, if he will admit he is an alcoholic, and is up against a problem that he cannot solve on his own, then there is every chance that he can recover. We have all been through the 'wringer' – hundreds of times we have said 'never again', and tried hard too, only to find that within weeks or months we were in the middle of another bender before we quite realised we had started. If you feel all alone and burdened down with problems like no one else had to deal with or carry, then you can be sure that there are many others in New Zealand who were in just that position, and have found a way to live reasonably happy and useful lives without alcohol. My wife had left me and taken the children – I had lost my job and was in a serious financial jam. I had been to many doctors and was in many institutions, but there seemed to be no answer. Unfortunately we have no active AA member in your town, but there is one thirty miles away and he is sure to call when he knows of you. I will come up at the first opportunity. If you admit you are an alcoholic and want to do something about it, write again and tell me a bit about yourself. We have no medication or pills or anything of that nature and know of no effective treatment by that method. Strange as it may seem, recovery appears to start from an admission of defeat and then facing one's problems in the light of AA experience. There are no dues or charges of any sort in AA – helping others has been found the best possible therapy for keeping we older ones on the beam and we always welcome an opportunity to help another who wants help. But we will not try*

*and convince you that you need help or that we have the answer – you must decide that, and with our help try to apply the AA programme and find out what we so much enjoy. If you are an alcoholic, then sobriety is the most important thing in the world to you. We attained it – maybe you can too. Let’s hear more from you.*

*Yours sincerely,  
Ian, 6 Sept. 1952”*

The AA member who forwarded me this letter went on to say:

*“The above letter has remained close by me for the past 25 years and has been of great comfort when I needed it most. It has served me well many times as a private AA meeting. The importance of this letter is that AA really works, as Bill W. would say, ‘By one alcoholic talking or writing to another.’*

*Yours sincerely,  
‘Grateful’, 6 Sept. 1977”*

Although Ian received his first copy of the Big Book in July, 1946 it was not the first copy to come into New Zealand. Gilbert Landsdown, an ardent prohibitionist, wrote from Auckland to John D. Rockefeller Jun. at the AA box number in New York some time in February, 1946 and received two complimentary copies in April. These he promptly placed – the first in the Salvation Army library on Rotoroa Island, the second in the Auckland Public Library. G.S.O. in New York asked Gilbert Landsdown to get in touch with Ian. Because of stringent post-war exchange control regulations, Landsdown was not able to get all the books he needed, but over the next three years, 1946 to 1949, he proved an indefatigable correspondent, bombarding New York for requests for up to 25 Big Books at a time, all of which were placed in Public Libraries or sent directly, at his request, to individuals throughout New Zealand. New York were as generous as they could be in filling these orders, allowing for the strength of the American dollar and the fact that they had to accept payment with sets of Peace stamps, South African pounds and New Zealand money which was sent illegally. An example of a good man willing to break the law in a cause he cared about.<sup>19</sup>

By April 1947, Ian had made contact with two possible members.<sup>20</sup> They were both to slip badly later and it was not until February the following year that there were five members, ‘all on solid ground’, and plans were being made to form the first group in New Zealand.<sup>21</sup>

The time between was taken up with the wide correspondence, gaining a deeper understanding of the AA programme and efforts made to carry the message. The first opportunity came with the arrival in New Zealand of the film *Problem Drinkers* in the *March of Time* series. These were a very

powerful set of documentary films on subjects of public interest and concern. Charlotte L. wrote from G.S.O., "I do hope you can see *March of Time*. There are quite a few pictures of our own office including all the girls who work here. You will see Bobbie's arm, and the back of my head – of course we must be anonymous!"<sup>22</sup> Ian wrote to the distributors and was eventually invited to Wellington where he met 36 of them and gave his first talk of this kind on AA. It was well received. Armed with advance showing dates he wrote to both the local newspapers and the theatres where the film was due to be seen, but, except for Christchurch which brought a promising assortment of enquiries, nothing much came of the venture.

The film did produce a minor public relations crisis and Ian talked to New York about it. The Auckland showing was a month ahead of schedule and Ian's usual letters had not been sent. An *Auckland Star* writer reviewed the film and heaped derision on AA in his column. Gilbert Landsdown sent a cutting down from Auckland suggesting Ian reply. Ian guessed that such an article would be ignored in the states but here, "with the press being the power that it is and AA being almost unborn, a protest should be made." Gilbert Landsdown wrote to the 'Star' as well and Ian's letter went unpublished. No further action was taken in spite of two more "equally silly paragraphs" by the columnist and Ian came to the conclusion that the film hit a raw spot in the writer who was best left alone in the meantime.<sup>23</sup> Bobbie B. too was sent a cutting by Gilbert Landsdown. The reaction from AA in New York was interesting and an important public relations lesson for Ian. G.S.O. too had come to the conclusion that the "Star" writer was himself having a little personal problem with drinking. Bobbie told Ian<sup>24</sup> that she had sent the columnist a very nice letter thanking him for his interest in AA and that, inasmuch as all newspaper men like facts, he was being sent some AA literature so that he could be reliably informed about us. The columnist was also told a few things about AA aims and purposes together with information about what can be done for sick alcoholics who wish to recover. Bobby doubted that he would write any more misrepresenting articles. She told Ian, "I think you were wise not protesting too much to this newspaper. Our experience shows that if we try to fight papers we only create resentment. My letter to Mr Mc gave him nothing about which he could argue."

Then came an event of considerable importance for AA in New Zealand – the first AA visitors from overseas. Bobbie wrote on 9 July 1947, to tell Ian that Lillian Roth, a famous night club singer, after years of alcoholic oblivion, was on the comeback trail after joining AA and would be performing on the Tivoli Theatre Circuit in Auckland within a month.<sup>23</sup> Lillian was travelling with Burt M., her husband, also an AA. Bobbie sent

Ian's address to Lillian and Burt and suggested that he write to them to arrange a meeting. Bobbie hoped he would be able to take advantage of the chance to meet "honest-to-goodness AA's face to face."<sup>26</sup> Later, Ian could not recall how he scraped the money together to get to Auckland, but he did, and found Burt "a very solid AA" who was "important to Lillian in maintaining her sobriety, which whilst enthusiastic was quite shaky."<sup>27</sup> This was Ian's first meeting with a recovered alcoholic. In the months that followed his visit to Auckland and the time spent there with Lillian Roth and her husband, Ian stayed close to home, now 'Balgowan', Spring Cove, Nelson, studying the Big Book, keeping sober and getting fit working on the farm.

The second person to gain sobriety in New Zealand through the AA programme was Alf J. in Auckland. When in Wellington talking with the distributors of the *March of Time* film, Ian had also visited the Health Department, telling them of his contact with AA. This encounter was shortly to bear fruit. The Health Department passed on to Ian a letter they had received from an Auckland doctor who had a relative in urgent need of treatment for alcoholism. The doctor had heard that someone in Wellington was in touch with a new approach and wrote for information. Immediately, Ian sent his only copy of the Big Book plus other literature. In order to focus his attention on the new treatment, the doctor had demanded that Alf, his brother-in-law, return with him to his (the doctor's) house at Titirangi and, once there, literally threw the book on the table saying, "see what you can make of that." Years later Alf was to recall, "I read that alcoholism was a disease. I remember the tremendous sense of relief I felt when at last somebody knew what I had been fighting all my life. I read the book, and the obsession with bottles of alcohol was simply taken away from me. It's something I will never be able to understand or explain."<sup>28</sup> Several months later when Ian and Alf were to meet it was to discover that they had been in the same class at school.

Soon after his correspondence with the Auckland doctor, Ian had his first Ywelfth Step call. He received a letter from Bill L. who wrote to say that he was in trouble through alcohol and had heard of the film, *Problem Drinkers*, and Ian's association with it. They met for the first time in the lounge of the Midland Hotel, Wellington. Ian thought that as he had spent hundreds of hours and a lot of money drinking there he had a right to use the facilities! The two found much in common and from this meeting, Bill L. found his sobriety.<sup>29</sup> Bill L. was a foundation member of the Wellington group and later moved on to Auckland where he operated the first alcoholic hostel, 'Mranga House' in Dominion Road.<sup>30</sup>

Another very early member was Arch F. in Dunedin. His widow recalls the events of 1947.



*“Ilan had spoken about AA from the pulpit of Central Mission church here and Arch read the report of it in the daily paper. At that time, Arch’s case was pretty desperate mentally, physically and financially, so he was naturally interested.*

*“He wrote to Ian and I remember Ian smiling at meetings wherer he quoted Arch’s letter which stated that, although he (Arch) didn’t consider his case hopeless, he felt the time was not far distant when it would be. Correspondence passed between Ian and Arch and I’ll never forget that Sunday afternoon when, having decided to try the programme, Arch sat in our lounge for hours sweating it out, until, admitting his helplessness, he finally turned his life over to God.*

*“Arch didn’t meet Ian untl the following year so I consider he did very well to make such progress with only contacts by letter from Ian to help him.*

*“When Howard H. came in it was a wonderful thing for Arch to have a sharing partner and I guess Howard felt the same. Arch’s next contact after Howard was Murdoch Y. whose wife approached us first on Murdoch’s behalf and that was the beginning of many ‘get-together’s’ between Arch and Murdoch and Anne and I. It was a tremendous relief for the early wives who had to bottle things up for so long to have someone to share the troubles and who ... understood completely.*

*“Arch was very enthusiastic about AA and he spared no time or effort if it could help another. We had many meetings of alkies and their wives at our home, as did Howard and Ena, untl it was decided to rent a room in the centre of the city.”<sup>31</sup>*

In the letter from Arch’s widow just quoted there are some words which encapsulate AA, “... having decided to try the programme, Arch sat in our lounge room for hours sweating it out, until, admitting his helplessness, he finally turned his life over to God.” To recover, the alcoholic needs to do three things: to have hit a personal rock bottom, to realise that he/she cannot get out of this situation alone, and to acknowledge the need for outside help. In essence, surrender. The alcoholic has to give up the illusion that he/she can handle alcohol. With surrender the fight is over. What happens then? Feelings of peace, harmony and acceptance replace the old feelings of guilt. We must not think of this giving up as a negative thing – rather, by accepting himself as he really is, the alcoholic learns a new humility. We are talking about a radical movement – a deep change in though patterns and behaviour, where the old illusory ideas of omnipotence give way to to an acceptance of reality and a willingness to seek and accept help from the outside. At the same time the alcoholic accepts his/her own limitations and takes those first tentative steps towards trust in

others, the helping hand of AA is there with the promise of new and secure relationships. In Alf's case, he was ready for and experienced a truly spiritual awakening. This is not necessarily a universal or even a mandatory response; all that is required of the alcoholic is the acknowledgment of some Power greater than himself/herself out there. Even before sobriety is gained the alcoholic can see the evidence made manifest in the AA groups where the members have moved to new strengths and serenity through, and in spite of, their own limitations.

The AA message is one of hope. Not a list of dos and don'ts which the alcoholic has heard for years from parents, employers, judges, policemen, doctors and priests, but another alkie saying, "this is what I did". And he is invited to share in the process of recovery as of right. As Bill W. said in recalling his first meeting with Dr Bob:

*"You see, our talk was a completely mutual thing. I had quit preaching. I knew that I needed this alcoholic as much as he needed me. This was it. And this mutual give-and-take is at the heart of all of AA's Twelfth Step work today. This was how to carry the message. The final missing link was located right there in my first talk with Dr Bob."<sup>32</sup>*

Father L.M. McFerran, one of the three original non AA members of the General Service Conference sees<sup>33</sup> essential similarities between AA's beginnings in America and the start of the fellowship in this country. Not only is there a marked affinity between the drinking patterns of Bill W. and Ian McE. but the two men were both from commercial backgrounds – Bill was a Wall Street Analyst, Ian, a commerce graduate, began his working life in the family firm, and, in their mid careers both men gave up their previous activities to devote themselves full-time to AA. Father McFerran points up other remarkable similarities also between Dr Bob, the American co-founder and Alf J. in New Zealand. Like Dr Bob, Alf came from a family active in church affairs: just as Dr Bob sobered up when he first got married and established his practice, Alf too, had ten "hellish sober years" in order to hold his family together and build up his practice. Father McFerran notes that Dr Bob sought an answer to his problems through the Oxford Group, Alf read everything he could on the problem in his life. It was a Methodist minister friend and the local mayor of the suburb in which Alf lived who read the same *Reader's Digest* article which led to Ian's letter to Bobby B. at the General Service Office in New York. There is another resemblance which Father McFerran notes: the fact that AA in New Zealand, as in America, is the story of two cities – Bill W. in New York, Dr Bob in Akron, Ohio. Whilst Ian made his base in Wellington, Alf remained in Auckland putting down AA roots as did Dr Bob in his home city.

These analogies are important, but in this country we must add a third city to the equation – Dunedin. Both Auckland and Dunedin, from the beginning, built up strong, consistent groups. Whilst many AA's can point to Ian as their sponsor, it is true that no group formed in Nelson until after he had left that city and Wellington, at least in the period up to 1951, never mustered either the numbers or the feeling of solidarity which characterised the groups which formed around Alf in Auckland and Arch in Dunedin. Ian was the public figure, the persuader, the educator, moving deliberately to reach those people most likely to come into contact with the alcoholic. Like Dr Bob in Akron, Alf and Arch worked directly in their own communities with fellow sufferers.

Whilst a large part of this history covers the work which Ian performed, we must not forget the less spectacular but nonetheless essential activities centred on the AA groups, where the strength of the fellowship resides.

## Chapter 3

### 1951 to 1956

#### Establishment of groups in most parts of New Zealand

The early members wasted no time in carrying the message; moving quickly from isolated individuals to prime movers in the formation of AA groups in their own communities. Alf J. in Auckland had a great number of calls for help immediately after he gained his own sobriety,<sup>1</sup> and the first AA group in New Zealand, which met in his home at Devonport,<sup>2</sup> was registered with G.S.O. in New York in June 1948 with three members.<sup>3</sup> By January 1950 the group had grown to twelve.<sup>4</sup>

A year later there were six groups in the country – Auckland with 16 members; Hastings 3; Wellington 4; Nelson 3; Dunedin 15 and Invercargill 5.<sup>5</sup> A notable gap being Christchurch which, after a promising start, had folded. This was the position of AA groups in New Zealand at the beginning of the decade.

Groups formed slowly in cities and towns the length of the country. Progress was slow but steady – in essence, one sober alcoholic talking to another still suffering the ravages of the disease. As the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* says, “Practical experience shows that nothing will so much ensure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics.”<sup>7</sup> The local group is the heart of the fellowship. In this period of development the Twelve Traditions which are the suggested guidelines for AA corporate life were studied, discussed and put into action. We benefitted from the shared experience of the movement in other countries, particularly North America, as the service centre there provided ample supplies of pamphlets and other literature. Whilst group life remains the most important aspect of AA, this chapter, relating the beginnings of AA in New Zealand as it relates to this essential aspect of the fellowship, is unbalanced in that we have not covered the history in an orderly fashion as it unfolded. This approach is deliberate. Some of the early activities of particular groups are covered in some detail; our purpose is to show, in microcosm, the way, repeated a thousand times, the philosophy of AA came to everyone

who reached out to touch the fellowship. Time and time again the early members made their initial contact with the movement through an advertisement in the local newspaper or a listing in the telephone book.<sup>8</sup> As soon as a group, sometimes consisting of a few struggling members, felt strong enough they moved out and made their presence known through the press. The implications are important. A publically expressed willingness to help presupposes an organised, albeit simple, set-up to respond to desperate enquires. It means a telephone must be manned, a letter to an anonymous box number demands a reply. It means being available day and night without fail.

With groups firmly established in Auckland and Dunedin, the chain began to get extra links. Ian noted in a letter to GSO, New York, on 23 July 1951 that "... two of the Dunedin members have been transferred to Timaru ...". One of these was Eric H. who, whilst in Dunedin, was Twelfth Stepped by Arch. Eric moved to Timaru after a year's sobriety in the Dunedin group and became the founder of AA in Timaru. Because he travelled a good deal between Christchurch and Dunedin, he also helped Oamaru when a group started there.<sup>9</sup>

Another Dunedin member, Alan H., began the Invercargill group and G.S.O. New York were advised of their formation early in 1951. As was common with most early groups, meetings were initially held in the homes of members.<sup>10</sup>

Ian had been to Palmerston North prior to 1952, fulfilling a speaking engagement at either Rotary or the Business Men's Lunch Club. There was no response from potential members and it was not until 1952 that Don Mc. heard a talk over the National Radio by Dr Sylvester M., a Sydney psychiatrist, who was visiting this country at the invitation of New Zealand groups, that the seed was sown. Don recalls:

*"How to find AA was my problem ... Needless to say, as a drinking alcoholic I didn't try too hard mainly because I wasn't ready.*

*"A few weeks later a copy of the 'Evening Post' was thrown onto my front verandah. I make the guess, but I think I am right, that a dear old lady living next door placed the paper. In the personal column was a notice marked with a small cross. The item said to the effect, 'If you have a drinking problem Alcoholics Anonymous can help you. Write to Post Office Box, Wellington.' This I did a few days later when I put down my empty glass on the 16th September. It was three weeks before I had a reply. AA in Wellington could have been going through a shaky stage. I did hear that the alcoholic who had the key of the box had a slip and wouldn't hand the key over.*

*"I eventually received a letter from Ian, my sponsor, who made me*

welcome to AA. Soon after that Ian came up to Palmerston North. He killed many birds with one stone as not only did he pay me a visit, but that evening he was to address a conference of doctors at Palmerston North Hospital on Alcoholics Anonymous. I thought that was really something. Here was an ex-drunk speaking to a great number of doctors on a disease, which, at the time, they knew little about.

*“AA in New Zealand at that time was a very close fellowship in ... that if a new member came to light in say, Palmerston North, AA members all over New Zealand knew about it and wished him well. One got to know most of them by name and, more closely, by correspondence. One also could be very concerned if one heard of a member say, in Hamilton, having a slip, so closely knit were the few groups.”*

“Traditionally”, says the Wold Directory, “any two or more alcoholics meeting together for purposes of sobriety may consider themselves an AA group, providing that, as a group, they are self-supporting and have no outside affiliation.” The following experiences, described by Don McL. of Palmerston North, illustrate the way in which a group formed itself and grew in those early days.

After being sponsored by Ian McE., Don was later joined by Doug McL, and together they formed the Palmerston North group of two members early in 1953. Don said, “We, like other groups, have proved that AA will only progress slowly. It was a long time before our third member, Jack, joined us and it took a number of years before the membership grew to fifteen solids.” Don made his offices available in Rangitikei Street for meetings and later arranged for the group to rent a room in the same building. Don recalled:

*“As our group grew, so did our enthusiasm, so much so that we would visit other groups in Wellington, and Hutt Valley, Napier, Wanganui and Masterton. We learned something we never forgot through a visit we made to Petone group. It was one wet Saturday night when a car load of us set off. The further we went the worse the weather became and we all questioned whether we should go on or return to Palmerston North. We decided to go on and when we reached Petone, a power failure had occurred all over the area. We thought we had come all the way for nothing. However on going round to the back of the hall we noticed a chink of candle light under the door. The door was opened by Tom. He and Bill were there. We told them how pleased we were to see them on such a terrible night. They said that the light will always be on at the Petone group. Tom and Bill also illustrated that it takes only two to make a group.”*

Don kept his sobriety by hospital visits made possible by Ian's initial contact

and introduction. He was able to visit any alcoholic patient at any time; the group advertised meeting times; made itself known to all professional people and welfare agencies; enjoyed visits from travelling AA's and were enthusiastic in keeping close contact with other groups.

When the draft of this study was circulating for comments, someone out there said, "Hey! What about the women?" The reminder is timely. For reasons which we cannot explore in detail, women alcoholics differ in a number of ways from their male counterparts.<sup>12</sup> In the beginning, AA itself did not think that it could sober up women.<sup>13</sup> This attitude changed just as AA itself changed when its appeal to wider community groups became obvious. In the early years, those who achieved sobriety were, almost without exception, considered to be hopeless cases. Gradually, the membership became younger, the fellowship drew in those who still retained health, home, social status.

Part of this change was reflected in the growing success with women alcoholics. There remained the stigma of alcoholism, a burden twice as heavy on women as men.<sup>14</sup> Women had to overcome a double standard even more rigid in the 1940s and 1950s than it is today. Around 1939-1940 when the first women began to attend the AA meetings in Akron, Ohio, they were helped by the wives of the male members of AA – a practice which continued for some years, there being so few women AAs to help the new women members.<sup>15</sup>

Small wonder then that Lil T., one of the first women AAs in New Zealand, had a hard and lonely time. Lil had been in touch with Ian and, with one other woman, attended the small group in Auckland with Alf J. The time – May, 1949. There were about three other members and she felt that "although of course, I wouldn't dare suggest it to them, the poor men are somewhat at a loss as to how to cope with we women."<sup>16</sup>

Lil was reading the Big Book given to her by the doctor to whom she had gone for help and she must have been directed to this particular physician by Ian as the doctor knew about AA and had a relative in the fellowship. We can be certain that he was Alf J.'s brother-in-law.

Also at Ian's suggestion, after about five months' sobriety, Lil wrote to Bobbie B. in New York, ostensibly for information of particular help to a woman AA, but more importantly, to put her in touch with other women AA's. The G.S.O. office at that time had three female secretaries, all members, and they quickly identified with Lil's needs, even offering all the help they could in setting up her own group, at the same time pointing out that in New York women were no longer an oddity and that all meetings were about 50-50.<sup>17</sup>

Regrettably, Bobbie B., after seven years of complete devotion to G.S.O.

had a serious breakdown necessitating retirement from all office activities. It is appropriate, whilst we are talking of women in AA, to pause and remember the contribution Bobbie B. made to AA in New Zealand. We are not the only country to have benefitted. In Australia, Dr Sylvester M. wrote to her in New York in 1942 after reading an article about AA in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*.

Writing in the Australian AA magazine, *The Reviver*, in 1953, Dr Sylvester said of Bobbie:

*“She has written to us since – and it is my opinion that the whole credit of starting AA in Australia is due solely to her advice and words of wisdom over the years.*

*“We wrote to her repeatedly about our difficulties. Once, when in despair of ever getting AA on its feet in Sydney, she wrote and told us that they had exactly the same experience as ourselves in America.”*

Another early woman member, Norah B. joined the fellowship in March, 1952, just as the Christchurch group was getting started with meetings in Fred C.’s house, Hagley Avenue. Norah answered an advertisement in the local paper inserted by the members and was visited by Bill L. who, whilst in Wellington, was Ian’s first successful Twelfth Step call.

Of the original Christchurch members – Fred C., Cyril E., Jack P., Bob F., Tom D., three, Norah, Ruth W. and Phil, were women. Hardly the 50-50 of New York, but a start.

Around September 1952, Christchurch members travelled to Timaru where Eric H. was still battling on as a loner and were joined for a weekend by the Dunedin group. Thus the chain began to get extra links and those already in place were made stronger.

All this time, G.S.O. in New York helped individual members with the same readiness they extended to struggling groups seeking guidance. From New York, Norah was given the names of experienced AAs in other countries to write to and she found the contacts helpful.

Norah recalled recently, “I used all the help I could get, I was going to do everything I had to to keep sober. It was not easy in those early days, people, for the most part, were so inexperienced it was necessary to seek all the help we could get from overseas.”<sup>18</sup>

Norah moved to Wellington in 1953 where she met Margaret and the two women were soon joined by Sue. Meetings were held in the National Party rooms and the women “seemed to be the only ones free (and sober) enough to answer the calls which were coming from enquirers” as Norah recalled.

She has fond memories of Ian McE. She first met Ian in Christchurch when



she had been sober six months – Ian 6½ years. Norah laughed, “he came to a meeting, we listened to what he told us. We were so impressed that we thanked him, said goodnight and left him to clean up and lock the hall. A nice way to treat a guest speaker!”

Norah also remembered that “if a meeting was getting too grim, Ian would ‘pray for a clown’. The best advice Ian gave me was to ‘act like a drunk whilst sober,’ in other words, to have fun.”

In the 1960s Norah felt the need for a women’s group in Wellington and wrote to New York for advice. She remembers some of the opposition: “... soon we were established, not without a few howls of horror from some of the men. I always told them that if they were having difficulty with the programme, the Women’s Group would be happy to help them. That seemed to settle any argument. We were indeed fortunate, the women who came to the group remained loyal and sober; to this day the few who are still alive keep in touch.”

Norah felt the need for this group because of community attitudes toward woman alcoholics who “were considered a disgrace indeed ... it was sad because I saw so many women die because their families did not want the shame of AA which they refused to believe in.”<sup>18</sup>

From the earliest days ‘special purpose groups’ have been accepted in every country where AA is found. Some members have found their special needs met by associating with others of similar background and interests – gays, women, blacks, etc. A recent issue of *Mainstay*<sup>19</sup> sets out the guidelines and conditions suggested by AA as appropriate for such meetings. *Guidelines*, Volume 26, No. 4, August-September 1981, and issued by G.S.O. New York, quotes a statement made in 1977 by Dr John L. Norris, then Chairperson of the General Service Board:

*“In general, we have inclined to this view: When other requirements are added that might seem to exclude some alcoholics, these should be considered AA meetings and **not** AA groups. We have never discouraged AAs from forming special-purpose meetings of any or all kinds to meet the needs of interested individuals, but we have been hesitant to consider as **groups** those that might seem to exclude any alcoholic, for whatever reasons.*

*“Many members feel that no AA group is special, and therefore that no group should be labelled as such, or even give the impression that it is ‘special’. However, the fact is that such groups **do** exist ... These groups feel that the ‘labels’ serve the purpose of attraction (double identification) and are not intended to imply exclusion of other alcoholics.”*

*Guidelines* adds to this statement:

*“In reality, where special groups are formed to meet the needs of a certain group within AA, they are generally not exclusive. They are open to any AA who wishes to attend; their **purpose** is sobriety. (One man, who got sober at the age of 70, attended his first meeting at a young people’s group and identified!)”*

Finally, and also from this issue of *Guidelines*:

*“Members of special purpose groups are certain that many of their kind would never be able to get themselves to AA if they had to enter through a regular group.*

*“Whether or not we agree with all this thinking, the point is that many alcoholics do agree with it. And they believe in it seriously enough to form these special groups and make them work.”*

Years before these guidelines were set down, the Women’s meeting in Wellington and other similar groups since, have not sought to exclude any AA whose sobriety would be enhanced by attending.

Auckland have had their own newsletter, *Unity*, originally known as *The Bulletin*, since 1960. In the January, February and May issues of 1980, considerable research produced very detailed chronicles of groups in most parts of New Zealand, with particular emphasis on those in the Auckland region. These articles, contributed by a variety of members, are a significant record for those who would like to read an affectionate tribute to the old-timers who had so much to do with the start of AA in the North and who later played a positive role in the unfolding of wider services.

To Rodney G. must go the credit for starting the first outside AA meeting held in Labour Party Hall in Devonport – the year 1947.<sup>20</sup> Rodney, sponsored by Alf J., had a travelling position and, like Justin W. a little later, carried the tidings of AA up and down the country.

When we reflect that some of the Auckland members are still active in the life of their meetings after 25 to 35 years of sobriety, we need to look more closely to account for this cohesion. The answer lies in what Ernest Kurtz calls “The unique AA phenomenon of ‘sponsorship’.”<sup>21</sup> Some organisations require a prospective member to be introduced by a sponsor; anyone who has a desire to stop drinking can be a member of AA. No intermediary is needed. AA assigns a much deeper meaning to the process whereby an experienced member of the group, compatible with the newcomer, in an equal relationship, provides close contact and support for as long as required. Needless to say, the sponsor is pleased when the new members widens his/her contacts with the group and, hopefully, can act as a sponsor to others in turn. Most AAs have a special link with their sponsor – a relationship which continues for years in one form or another. Frequently, the health of a group is signalled by the quality of sponsorship

within it and this seems to have been the strength of Auckland in those early days. Not surprising therefore, is the sponsorship of the first prison group at Mount Eden late in 1955 when Scotty K., Doug D. and Stan B. started the meeting in that institution.<sup>22</sup>

The act of sponsorship is something which can only be fostered, not forced. In more recent times concern has been expressed about a decline in this crucial process:

*“... in the early days when there were no hospitals and AA’s were small in numbers ... sponsorship had been superb. Now we have seen the situation occur where the norm has become recovery in hospitals. and the abnormal is recovery in AA. The result is that the urgency of sponsorship ... has been removed ... very few people who are now active in AA have experienced the supportive effect of a sponsor, so that their personal experience doesn’t lead them to give what they haven’t experienced themselves ...”<sup>23</sup>*

In addressing the many issues which face an AA group, such as sponsorship, the right use of money, the application of the Twelve Steps and so on, constant reference is made to the ‘group conscience’. With the Twelve Traditions as the touchstone, against which every decision is measured, the group can search in unity and form a common base for the right answer, secure in the knowledge that, collectively, a more innovative, original and creative response is possible than would be the case if each member were to act alone.

Frequently one hears the words, “there are no musts in AA.” This is true. Without a significant amount of individual freedom the fellowship would have become rigid and formal, repelling those most in need of help. Without some authority over the members the movement could descend into anarchy. Therefore the members acknowledge the ultimate authority of the ‘group conscience’ which their own participation has a part in forming.

## Chapter 4

### 1957 to 1960

#### The Groups Coming Together

By the early 1950s membership, whilst scattered, was growing. There were twenty-six members all told in August 1949 – including a group in Auckland with ten members and the same number in Dunedin with a lone member in Christchurch.<sup>1</sup> There was no group in Wellington.<sup>2</sup>

In September 1949 Ian, with the consent of the groups, became the General Service Centre for New Zealand and the placement of all orders for books, literature and *Grapevine* subscription was to be handled through him.<sup>3</sup> This arrangement was confirmed by G.S.O., New York the same month.<sup>4</sup>

By October 1950 the membership of AA in New Zealand had reached fifty-five,<sup>5</sup> and Ian felt the need to give the fellowship ‘some stability and unification.’ He proposed an Alcoholic Foundation for New Zealand and wrote to the AA Foundation in New York setting out his ideas. It was a very grand letter, not in tune with the usual chatty letters he had been in the habit of sending. Ian the ex-businessman had taken over from Ian the ex-drunk! He told of his work over the previous three years during which he had spent six months of each year moving around the country in a public relations capacity, speaking to various groups – Rotary (as employers), the British Medical Association, medical students and the press. Ian saw the proposed Foundation as having three AA members geographically spread, plus four non AAs.

Ian was at the end of his financial resources and had to make some decisions about his own future.

On 15 November 1950 Bill W., the co-founder of AA replied. His letter was very important at that time and is quoted in full:

*November 15, 1950*

*Dear Ian M.*

*Pardon my delay in answering your letter of October 24th. Because of my personal experience in exactly the same situation as yours, I have been asked to write to you.*

*First of all, our congratulations on your progress. Compared with our early days here in the United States, you seem to have gone far indeed. Please know that I feel entirely in sympathy with your objectives and pretty generally agree with your outlined means of reaching these.*

*A few general observations based on our experience here might be helpful. Might I suggest that you proceed at first on a rather informal basis? After careful consultation with leading outlying members, could you not form something which might be called "The AA Foundation Committee of New Zealand" drawing into its membership the people you now have in mind. This could be done on an experimental, tentative basis. Though our early Committee here bore the resounding title 'The Alcoholic Foundation', it never came to be incorporated for many years. This has advantages, it leaves you fluid, elastic. If mistakes are made, you are not in a legal mess with vested titles, and so forth. Later, when you have proved the workability of the set-up, incorporation is desirable and very necessary. But I wouldn't hurry that. Put the business on a trial and error basis at first. Or, at the most, what a solicitor would call an Agreement of Trusts. Be sure, too, that you have the full consent and understanding of 90% of the present membership. Otherwise hard opposition will compromise and probably defeat your purpose.*

*Now, about the money aspect. In the early days here, we had a little outside help. The fact that it was very little probably saved the AA movement from professionalism, even disaster. In fact, we had so little money that we alcoholics raised funds among ourselves to publish the book. My personal income for a period of seven years from our general funds averaged about \$1700.00 a year. It was awfully rough going but I am now satisfied our poverty saved us. Had Mr D. Rockefeller, who was deeply interested, been unwise enough to endow us handsomely, or had we have heavy government support, I think it would have ruined us.*

*Therefore, I suggest you go very slowly in taking large grants, no matter how attractive they look. If you receive an income yourself from outside donations, be sure to make it clear you are paid for special services, not for 12 Step work. If you ever begin to look like a paid therapist or missionary, you will be done for. Incidentally, my own support for full time AA work today derives from a royalty on the book, "Alcoholics Anonymous". This I earn as an author but not as a missionary. The arrangement leaves me strictly amateur.*

*Neither do I know much about governmental attitudes in New Zealand. In some other parts of the world, Finland being the troublesome example just now, government money brings headaches. The minute they put in*

*money, their social workers want to run the AA. You know alcoholics well enough already to realise that won't work. Even modest funds from such a source must be free of commitment.*

*I believe that Australia has had some experience with Foundations. While I may be badly informed, I carry the impression they were a bit premature. They got too well and too firmly organised too quickly. In general, the more informal and simple, the better. In this connection, you could consider the ultimate size of AA in New Zealand.*

*In conclusion, the AA Tradition really gives you carte blanche to do as you like – you can even disagree with the AA Tradition itself. Yet, I urge you, go cautiously about large money commitments or organisation. Take no step at this stage which cannot easily be retraced. And, regard any outside funds as temporary help. Always keep in mind the desirable, ultimately necessary goal of self-support. You shouldn't get married to the government or to anybody.*

*Devotedly yours,  
William G. W.*

WCW/hgh

Ian's concept of the kind of service structure for New Zealand at that time was premature.<sup>6</sup> The pattern of growth in this country led to quite a different set-up, one which was to be on a much more local and group level. It has proved, in the long term, to be more solidly based than a rather grandiose 'Foundation' imposed on a small and fragile membership.

Ian felt surprise that there were not more among the recovered alcoholics who were willing to give the time and effort to the sort of public relations work he was doing alone. These AA's would do anything in response to a Twelfth Step call but did not break out new ground.<sup>7</sup> He felt great concern that he was possibly making a job for himself but felt also that the new groups being formed and the increased community awareness being fostered by his work was not something he could neglect.

Bill W. expressed misgivings over the receipt of grants from outside agencies and from Government. He knew Ian had received \$250.00 from the Health Department in 1949 and it was anticipated that this would be the first instalment of a regular grant which could increase in value each year.

Ian was now in a very similar position to that which had been reached by the co-founders of AA – Bill W. and Dr Bob when the fellowship was young. Bill could not continue his work full time and Dr Bob was unable to put in more than half his time without a regular income for both of them.<sup>8</sup>

The Twelve Traditions of AA were being written at this time. They had

already been refined from the original 'long form' of 1946 to parallel the format and style of the Twelve Steps. The First International Convention of AA met in Cleveland, Ohio, in the northern summer of 1950 – a few months before Bill's letter to Ian. At this Convention the Twelve Traditions were approved and adopted by the whole movement. They became the Second Legacy of AA; the Steps being the first.

*"The Twelve Traditions are to group survival and harmny what AA's Twelve Steps are to each member's sobriety and peace of mind."*<sup>9</sup>

Much earlier, before the Traditions had been set down as suggested guidelines for group conduct, it had been clearly understood that, under no circumstances, could money be paid to a member of AA for doing Twelfth Step work.

Bill W. had the royalties from the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, to provide a minimal income. Ian had no such resource. Over the three previous years, 1947 to 1950, he had contributed about \$2,000 of his own money to AA. There was no difficulty in the use of his time in spreading the word about the fellowship, but he was unable to continue moving around the country unless his expenses were met from some source.

Ian felt that new members, new contacts and greater community awareness followed his visits and that he was making the biggest contribution to this work.<sup>10</sup> One reason for setting up the proposed Foundation was to have a group to whom problems could be referred and who would also act as a source of finance. In a further letter to Ian, dated 21 December 1950, Bill W. had this to say, "Concerning your problems of becoming a fulltime worker, I think there is little I can add. You need only consult the situation, as you see it, the AA Tradition, and your conscience. This well done, the right answer will surely follow. If, by chance, the answer is wrong, then you will have learned by experience, which is quite usual for me."

Soon after this exchange of letters with Bill W. a row blew up over money, authority, public relations, and leadership. Some comment on these issues is important. At the outset, AA in the United States faced these problems – how much money did the fellowship really need? Who had authority to make decisions? What sort of organisational structure should be set up? Put simply, AA decided that the primary purpose of the fellowship was to reach the still suffering alcoholic. To do this job properly, minimal organisational structure was needed and, therefore, a minimal amount of money. "It is in this sense that AA has declared for the principle of corporate poverty."<sup>11</sup> The concept, set out in Tradition Seven, reads, "Every group ought to fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions."

The emphasis on self reliance comes through most clearly when discussing legacies. When AA was very young and the New York office were facing

one of their regular financial crises, word came that an AA member intended leaving the fellowship a legacy of \$10,000.00. After intense debate the gift was declined. AA must remain forever poor – only receiving from members enough money to pay for essential services with a little in reserve – no more and no less. Up until 1969, following the lead of New York, bequests were declined in this country, but, with a change in North American policy, these are now acceptable from AAs only in the year of the member's death with an upper limit of \$300.00\* in each instance. Thus, the temptation to accept large sums of money with consequent problems is avoided.

These early members had been studying not only the Big Book, but also the Secretary's Handbook and the December 1950 *Grapevine* with the article *Your Third Legacy* written by Bill W. and Dr Bob giving them a much clearer picture of the way AA worked. Ian wanted no monopoly on knowledge about gaining sobriety through AA – the only way for the fellowship to grow was for members to share their experience with others. New members, however, were keen to learn not only how group life could be fostered, but also to understand something of the relationship between groups. When Ian became "The General Service Centre" for New Zealand in September 1950, 'with the consent of the groups', it is not clear just how many groups were in agreement. The suspicion lingers that Ian may have pushed agreement, so deep was his concern to foster the fellowship. The 1950 *Grapevine* article became a talking point and focussed the disquiet of some who felt that Ian was assuming too much of a leadership role. Ian had always felt "very deeply the need to carry the news of AA to any other place in New Zealand where alcoholics are in need of it. Right from the beginning it has not been my policy to seek for alcoholics but to tell the story to those most likely to come into contact with them."<sup>12</sup>

Ian had also made it clear that he did not go, without invitation, to any city where a group was already established. Six AAs spent time at Ian's farm over Christmas, 1950, and informal discussions with them on the question of money 'took a sharp unpleasant turn.'<sup>13</sup> There were accusations that Ian had 'professionalised' AA and one group in particular was strong in its criticism. A meeting convened by Bill L. for January 1951 fell through and was reconvened for 20 March at Lower Hutt. The intention of the meeting being to set up a representative committee for AA in New Zealand so that the fellowship as a whole could take responsibility for the various services as suggested in the *Grapevine* article. There was a flurry of letters and after the dust had settled a number of misunderstandings were cleared up.

\* The upper limit for legacies has been regularly reviewed by Conference, in the light of inflation and international AA practice. At the time of this printing it stands at ??????????????



The suggestion that all members in New Zealand be considered as one group was not feasible and the idea was abandoned. Ian, in turn, acknowledged that he held no position of authority in AA in New Zealand. A committee was formed in Wellington to meet from time to time as required to decide matters relating to the general affairs of AA in this country. Box 202, Te Aro, was adopted as the national address and Barney F. became the first secretary. Ian was elected a member of the committee and four others were to be appointed by the districts.<sup>14</sup> In an earlier letter to Bill W., Ian acknowledged that, "Perhaps I have been in error in not having some sort of informal committee earlier."<sup>15</sup>

Painful though the encounter may have been, the early members were right in challenging the acceptance of outside money by the fellowship. In addition to the Health Department grants, Ian was arranging for one or two friends to pay for his trip to Christchurch and this was one of the issues discussed in the light of the Seventh Tradition.

Over the next seven to eight years, the fellowship grew in strength with groups forming in most cities and towns. However, it was not until 1958 that provincial intergroup service committees were set up, and another eight years before AA in New Zealand formed its national body – The New Zealand General Service Conference. Whilst the 1950 proposals for a Foundation were premature, they forced the young fellowship to look at a number of issues and to see them in the light of both the Traditions and their own understanding and experience.

Tradition Nine states: "AA, as such, ought never to be organised, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve." In a letter to Ian dated 25 July 1955, Bill W., the co-founder of AA said:

*"There is a lot of confusion about this business of organisation in AA. Nobody is more for keeping it simple than I am. The old long form of the Traditions said 'That AA should have the least possible organisation'. But in the new form, you will note that we say 'AA should forever remain unorganised.' But that we may organise services. This means that AA as a whole shall not have any government or organisation as such. But we do have to organise the services and, particularly at the top level, we have to organise them well so that AA can function. If we don't do this, AA will not remain simple, it will get very complicated. So, in actuality, organisation of the services is a step in the direction of simplicity and away from chaos. Lots of folks haven't got this distinction clear in their minds as yet. But that will come."*

No one in AA has the power to direct or govern another. The only discipline is self-imposed - for the individual, the Twelve Steps as a suggested path

to recovery; for the groups and AA as a whole, the Twelve Traditions. Again, these are the distillation of hard won experience as and Bill W. said in an earlier letter to Ian, "... the AA Tradition really gives you carte blanche to do as you like – you can even disagree with the AA Tradition itself." But we know that unless the Traditions are applied AA will decline and disappear just as surely as the AA member jeopardises his/her own sobriety by not trying to work the steps.

By the middle of the fifties, groups were established the length of the country. *Mainstay* printed a map of New Zealand in the November 1955 issue showing 22 groups but, by March the following year, a similar map showed the revised position with over forty-four groups.<sup>17</sup> Later the same year<sup>18</sup> *Mainstay* reported that the 1956 Handbook and World Directory listed New Zealand membership at 440.

Tradition Eleven says, "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films." Just as the individual alcoholic consolidates his/her own continued sobriety by working with others, so too does the AA group ensure its own continuity and well-being by fulfilling a public relations role. That is, by making the AA way of life known to the still suffering alcoholic.

From the very early days of AA in New Zealand, groups, once established, have held 'open' meetings. These are regular occasions, as often as one meeting a week, when family members, friends and others interested in and concerned about alcoholism are able to attend an AA meeting.

Palmerston North group, alte in 1954, celebrated their second birthday with an open meeting at which there were fifty present. Among outside speakers was the Superintendent of the Public Hospital. Seventeen Wellington members made the trip and ten came from up to 100 miles away. Wally McT., an American engineer with the paper mill project, was a speaker on this occasion.<sup>19</sup>

Public meetings provide another forum. Ian McE. recalled, in his talk to the Anniversary Dinner, the first such meeting held in Wellington. It was in 1958. The original booking was for the Town Hall, but wiser counsel prevailed and the venue was shifted to the Concert Chamber. This was the as that appeared in *The Dominion* of 28 June 1958: "Alcoholics Anonymous Tells its Story to the Public. Films and Speakers. Concert Chamber, Town Hall, Wellington. 8pm, Wednesday, 2 July 1958" (Inserted by AA Inter Group Service Committee). As it was, over 400 attended with Dr Mirams in the chair. Ian recalled:

*"We had, I think, only six members at the time and only four of them were dry..."*

*“After the meeting, I think it was the Public Relations Officer of the Railways, came up to me and said how much he had enjoyed the meeting. He said, ‘You know I have never heard six men present such a balanced case.’ Well, you can imagine how balanced it was, trying to get four shaky AAs to speak at all, but they all did, God Bless them, ... and from that AA spread out to the Hutt and soon they had a group out there ...”<sup>20</sup>*

AA groups have always sought the co-operation and friendship of people in their own communities, bearing in mind, that ‘we are limited to sharing our own firsthand knowledge’ of the suffering alcoholic, and of recovery. Tia T., talking of the early days in Rotorua, tells of the help the group received from the Mayor, who always chaired the public meetings, the Probation Officer, who, at one period, lent his office for meetings, the local Doctor, always ready to provide medical care, and the Salvation Army officers and Catholic priests always helpful and frequent attenders at meetings. Without exception, AA groups all over New Zealand can report similar experiences in community co-operation.

## Intergroup

Characteristically, the formal service structure in New Zealand had a modest start. At a February 1958 AA meeting in the library of St Mary’s Church, a number of members suggested that a combined Intergroup should be formed in the Wellington Province to service activities for that area.

Wes M. of Eastern Suburbs Group was deputised to write to all groups. On 18 February an invitation was extended to a meeting for 1 March in the Boardroom of the Show Buildings, Wellington, to explore the proposal. Twenty-eight representatives attended, and with Ian in the Chair and Wes as temporary secretary, it was agreed to form an ‘AA Intergroup Service Committee’.

Groups were requested to endorse the proposal, forward names of their representatives and to make provision for financial support. Events moved quickly. The next meeting was set down for 15 March at the same venue. At each meeting Dick Carron’s tape on General Services of AA’ was played and later, Bill W.’s article ‘Respecting Money’ from the November 1957 issue of *Grapevine* was read and included in the minutes for the benefit of those not present. The 15 March meeting was the first time in New Zealand that AA groups had joined to pool some of their resources.

As Bill’s article said:

*“... Our spiritual way of life is safe for future generations if, as a society,*

*we resist the temptation to receive money from the outside world. But this leaves us with a responsibility – one that every member ought to understand. We cannot skimp when the treasurer of our group passes the hat. Our groups, our areas, and AA as a whole, will not function unless our services are sufficient and their bills are paid.*

*“When we meet and defeat the temptation to take large gifts, we are only being prudent. But when we are generous with the hat we give a token that we are grateful for our blessings and evidence that we are eager to share what we have found with all those who still suffer.”*

This practice of listening, reading and reflecting on Traditions continued as an integral part of the Intergroup which not only gave the delegates a rationale for their activities, but also through them, the AA members back in the groups gained in knowledge and understanding.

In addition to Wellington groups, representatives came from Hastings, Palmerston North, Pahiatua, Upper Hutt, Petone and Masterton. A fund was set up to purchase literature and Ian was authorised to obtain an import licence for £200 for the coming year. Planning began for a Public Meeting to be held in the Concert Chamber of the Town Hall.

Whilst we have said that the Intergroup Service Committee represented the first occasion on which groups had combined resources and worked together, we mean that this was done on a formal and continuing basis to further those objects designed to provide a service to AA as a whole. The editors of *Mainstay*, from the inception of the magazine, were enthusiastic in fostering the spirit of fellowship. The very first issue asked the question, “Why shouldn’t we organise an annual convention, if not for the whole of New Zealand, then at least say, Northern and Southern Conventions?”<sup>22</sup> There was a South Island Convention at Timaru on 5 May 1956<sup>23</sup> and *Mainstay* continued to report on open AA meetings in all parts of the country: North Shore group with a write up in the *North Shore Times* of 24 August 1955 with 100 present; Hamilton group met on 28 August with attendance of 90; there were 150 at Palmerston North’s open meeting on 9 October, and, early in 1956 there were open meetings recorded at Oamaru, Balclutha and Alexandra. In August 1956<sup>24</sup> a letter to the editor made the case for a New Zealand Conference to help with the liaison with G.S.O., New York and to take advantage of cheaper printing rates through bulk orders.

In the spring of 1956<sup>25</sup> the editors reported that, in response to a questionnaire they had sent out, “a consensus indicated a desire for an AA Convention. Easter seems to meet with approval and *Mainstay* will start things moving and advise after consultation with South Island committee and perhaps Sue and Sturat in Wellington.” A month later the

response from Wellington<sup>26</sup> indicated that Easter was a bit too close so they had suggested Queen's Birthday weekend, 1-3 June. An enrolment form was enclosed.

The *Mainstay* editors were enthusiastic about fostering a Conference which was seen as an opportunity for AA's from many places to come together and 'share their experience, strength and hope with each other' in the context of what was to be an extended AA meeting. It was not seen as a place where AA business would be conducted.

Thus began a long and close association with 'Arahina'. The first Conference was held in June 1958<sup>27</sup> followed by another in October the following year.<sup>28</sup> Writing in *Mainstay*<sup>29</sup> many years later, Ian recalled the place as having:

*"... very close and dear memories for some of the older AAs. 'Arahina' is the name of a fine old brick family home at Marton on the main trunk line. It was owned by the Girl Guides Association and used by them in school holidays as a training centre.*

*"To meet rising costs they offered it for Conventions to any organisation with such a need. The main hose could sleep 20 to 30 in a number of rooms with some verandah space.*

*"We made our own beds, cleared the tables after meals and washed up... There were large fireplaces in all public rooms and plenty of cut firewood. We had to start the fire in the morning and just stoke it up all day. There was a Conference Hall in the grounds which was later used for the Saturday afternoon meeting and the public or open meeting on Saturday night."*

Such was the charm of the place that the Intergroup Service Committee, later to become the Central Area Assembly of AA decided to meet there annually, as well as periodically in other places. It was at 'Arahina' too, that the General Service Conference of AA came into being in August 1964 after the first New Zealand Convention at Massey University in Palmerston North, 16 February 1964, had approved its formation.

Just as the early meetings at 'Arahina' were intended to foster unity through fellowship, the Intergroup Committee meetings pursued the same objective through service. It will be simpler to look at the achievements of Intergroup under the headings of the various activities through which the groups found that a pooling of resources enabled them to better fulfil the concept of service.

Firstly, the very existence of this alliance gave AA a public face and, in matters affecting AA as a whole, it became possible to speak with one voice. Whilst this, the first Intergroup in New Zealand, was limited geographically to the Wellington Province, it set the pattern on which

later coalitions were to model themselves. Furthermore, its central position made it possible for representatives from further afield to attend, firstly on an ad hoc basis and later by design. From these enlarged meetings came the initiative for the setting up of a General Service Conference in 1964. Intergroup became an important training ground, both for individuals to assume responsibilities beyond caring for their own sobriety, and for groups to learn to work together. Decisions were nearly always made by consensus and, where a vote indicated evenly divided opinion, the matter was frequently left to one side until the way could be seen more clearly. Power within AA is diffused by a system of rotating committees with very limited authority – the concept of service as opposed to government. An added advantage being that a greater number of members have the opportunity to serve.

From the outset, the venue for Intergroup meetings was not confined to Wellington. Whilst the first two were held in that city – 15 March 1958 and 12 April, the third was in Palmerston North, the fourth in Wanganui, the sixth in Napier. A pattern was established which continues to this day.

We have seen how the individual groups carried the message by holding public meetings. Particularly when the Intergroup met outside Wellington there was a public meeting in the evening following the completion of AA business in the afternoon. In Wanganui on 7 June 1958, talks were given to prison inmates as well as the usual public meeting; in Napier, the sixth meeting, the Mayor, Peter Tait, chaired the evening meeting. In this way, the local group was supported and the community awareness of AA increased. Let us now look in more detail at the ways in which Intergroup grew and developed over the eight or so years from 1958 to 1964.

Perhaps nothing so well illustrates the importance of Intergroup as the work of supplying literature. In the north, Alf J. imported 150 Big Books<sup>30</sup> augmenting Ian's and Gilbert Landsdowns efforts.

The first attempt at a New Zealand pamphlet was a reprint of AA in which Ian proposed to add his own story and that of Bill O'N who was the AA secretary in Sydney.<sup>31</sup> There was a word of caution from New York as generally permission to reprint was given provided there are no additions or deletions.<sup>32</sup> It is not known whether anything came of this venture.

Booksellers had fewer problems over currency and import licences than individuals. One device was to encourage the local bookseller to stock the Big Book and then rush in to buy them all.<sup>33</sup> New Zealand was not the only country with post-war exchange problems. Bobbie B. wrote to Ian on 4 June 1948: "We well recognise the situation about books. We've had long correspondence with the Australian AAs, and after exploring it thoroughly here, we found out that the Government could grant permission

to allow entry of our books into Australia if they wished. I believe that is now in the hands of Clive B., the secretary of the Central Office in Sydney." Bobbie went on, "Why don't you write and find out what is going on in this matter. Our book is copyrighted and we thought of having it printed abroad for distribution in other countries, but the Trustees feel that this would not be wise for many reasons. We are willing to do anything we can to help get our books to the alcoholics in other countries where Government restrictions now prohibit the sending out of payment for goods purchased in the United States." One suggestion was that "funds be deposited in a Bank in your country and held there until such time as the restrictions ended and they could be released." Bobbie continued, "In the meantime, I'm going to send you two books 'on the cuff' as we say in America. It simply means that we will send you the books and not bill them but hold them in our account for some future time when perhaps the Government restrictions will be dissolved. They will go out with a label saying the package is an 'Unsolicited Gift.' We have been doing this for Ireland and England and the members there have been getting payment to us from time to time through travellers or through personal accounts held in this country. It's all very roundabout and we make no stipulation as to time."

The surge of demand for Big Books and other literature raised problems for New York and they were forced to look at the whole way of operating. There were requests coming from Australia, New Zealand and England and all these countries shared exchange control problems.<sup>34</sup>

The desperate need for books had to be balanced against the capacity of New York to extend credit until such time as the exchange position improved. At this time G.S.O. was operating on a deficit. "It is sad but true, that our groups do not contribute as they should to the maintenance of this office."<sup>35</sup> Only one half of the American groups were supporting New York. Gradually the situation righted itself; AAs in this country put in some \$200.00 on 'loan'<sup>36</sup>, import licences were granted and the only restriction became the capacity of the members to get the funds remitted to the States. For a while New York wondered where all the books were going, but Ian pointed out that membership here tended to be way ahead of the Directory figures, "In fact, there are many more books in this country than have come to us – and still we are short. The alcoholic in his cups will not bother to get a copy from the library, we find, but this does not mean is not good material and able to recover. I feel books are a must."<sup>31</sup> Through all this time there was a clear understanding that every piece of literature, every book, every pamphlet would be paid for. And they were.

Just as each group was to be self-supporting through the contributions of its own members, Intergroup too, could not look to sources outside the

fellowship for funding, and was entirely reliant on member groups for operating expenses. A petty cash box was on the table at each meeting, and donations from delegates and observers provided the money needed for postage and other minor items.

The reliance on the Big Book and the need for a service structure sprang out of the North American experience rather than from a felt need in this country. When Jack Alexander's article appears in the *Saturday Evening Post*, membership quadrupled in the last six months of 1941 from 2,000 to 8,000 members. It was no longer possible for each enquiry to be followed up with a personal visit and New York, where the Big Book was published, became the distribution centre. The need to respond to the flood of letters pouring in led to the setting up of a service centre.

Therefore, it is interesting to note here, after the initial fund was set up by the member groups, the response in terms of sales was consistently disappointing and it was only substantial purchases by groups in other parts of New Zealand and outside this particular Intergroup which kept the literature fund going. It was not until March 1963, exactly five years after the establishment of Intergroup, that sales put pressure on the stock available. It is ironic that the demand for literature which, in America, led to the servicing of members from a central office, did not eventuate in this country where the facility was set up but not fully utilised.<sup>38</sup>

In March 1963 it was decided to supply free literature to all institutional groups in the area and later in the year (June), this proposal was extended to provide each new group with a parcel of literature to value of £3. Because sales were not as high as anticipated, Intergroup were forced a year later to move back from this position and agreed, "That up to 50% of gross profit from the sale of literature be made available for supply of literature to institutions or new groups in the Central Assembly area."<sup>39</sup> We can only speculate as to the reason for the failure of member groups to make better use of the literature made available; the situation changed as time went by, but it was a long haul to the point where, in 1970, over 6,000 pieces of literature were distributed nationally.<sup>40</sup>

There is an immediacy about recordings and tapes of speakers on AA and, from the beginning, they have been as valuable as any other way of communicating the message. As early as July 1947, Bobbie B. advised Ian that a set of Bill W.'s records were on their way by air express. Ian had written earlier, on 30 June, "I am absolutely thrilled to hear of recordings being made by Bill... I wonder if any one of you would risk the cost and send me a set airmail. I will get the cost to you in the long run. Air freight may be as expensive as the records or more, but it will make the difference between getting them in about ten days or two months or more.."



Later, on 14 August, in a personal note to Bill W., Ian spoke of the tremendous impact the records made on him, "I wish I could adequately describe the beauty of the peaceful setting in which I listened to the recorded talk made by you... I carried them round for 24 hours impatiently waiting for an opportunity to hear them as I am away from home." Ian copied these recordings to send to Lillian Roth and added a special message for Australian AAs so that she could take them with her to Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and other cities.

In the northern summer of 1950, AA held its first international convention in Cleveland, Ohio, when the Twelve Traditions of unity were adopted by the fellowship. In September the same year recordings of the big meetings, Dr Bob's last talk and the Traditions Meeting were offered to AA in New Zealand but, as they were recorded at 33<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> rpm, it was, amazingly, another three years before they could be generally used in this country. In 1950 only the broadcasting studios were equipped with long playing turntables; by the middle of the decade they were to be commonplace. When they finally arrived in 1955, Ian wrote to Bill W., "No words can express our deep sense of gratitude to you for the happy thought that led to you sending those records. They arrived at the end of April and have already been heard by dozens of AAs who have listened with rapt attention as the great story unfolds. I think they have come at a very fortunate time; for AA is well established and receiving many call for help and it will be important that we go forward with unity."

About this time tape recorders, too, became generally used and one of the first activities taken up by the new Intergroup was the setting up of a tape library. Groups, too, experimented with this method of communication and the experience of the Wellington group as reported in *Mainstay*, September 1955, is worth repeating:

*"Joy reports from Wellington – Bob H. said farewell to the Wellington Group a couple of weeks ago, prior to his departure for the U.S.A. A suggestion was made that we hire a tape recorder for the purpose of recording our meeting, after which each member would say a few words to our AA friends in America and Bob would take this tape over with him. This idea was enthusiastically received and arrangements for the hire left in the hands of Leslie.*

*The day of the meeting I happened to meet Leslie worriedly sipping at his coffee in the same restaurant as I. He was flat out trying to fit in various jobs such as a trip to the Reserve Bank for dollars for 'Grapevine', 12th Stepping, and, of course, the all important tape recorder.*

*The meeting duly assembled and Ian really excelled himself in his opening address – and that's certainly saying something, as we all know. I*

*personally took particular care to articulate clearly, enunciate carefully, etc. when repeating the Serenity Prayer, wracking my brains to recall all my elocution teacher had tried to drum into my embryo alcoholic head many, many years ago. I had even taken a little extra care when applying my lipstick for the occasion. What effect I hoped this would have on the tape recorder I am not quite sure – must have been a hangover from the days when I was personally working hard at establishing closer relations with the United States back in 1944.*

*The meeting was an excellent one, Bob made a very nice au revoir speech and I sat back feeling very proud to be a member of Wellington group and thinking what a wonderful organisation AA is and how close it brings all countries in the world. My power of concentration is still not good and my mind was far away with Bob and his first meeting in the u.S.A. when our tape recording would be played. I came out of my roseate dream with a start. Ian was laughing, Bob was looking slightly bewildered and Leslie's jaw had dropped somewhere below his chest. That's right – we had forgotten to switch on the tape recorder.*

*There was, of course, general laughter – except from Leslie, who incidentally is our Treasurer. "Humph! No laughing matter, the cost of hiring that tape recorder is £1 – absolute waste of money and time."*

*We have promised Bob that we will send a recording over to him of one of our meetings, but so far no-one has had the courage to approach our Treasurer regarding the hire."*

In October 1958, Intergroup set up a Tape Library with Bob C. as first custodian. From the beginning the library was a success and by early the following year 28 tapes were available for group use, increased to 43 by May 1960. Initially the library held mainly American inspired talks – Marty Mann, Dick C., Bill W., Dr Bob and Charles Laughton. Father John Doe too. But increasingly, New Zealand tapes were added: Ian McE.'s talk in Palmerston North, 10 May 1958; an Auckland Public Meeting; Dr Maling's broadcast talk, 16 August 1959; a Hawera Public Meeting; an AA Meeting in Wellington Library Hall; and a Hastings Public Meeting, 28 May 1960. In 1962 the Tape Library was conducted from Wanganui by Eric P. and, in contrast to the sale of literature, was in great and continuous demand.

In three areas, the initiatives sponsored by the AA Intergroup Service Committee (later the Central Area Assembly) merged with, and became the basis of the work undertaken by, the General Service Conference. This included the provision of literature, the tape library and the rooms set up in Wellington.

*Mainstay* remained the personal effort of Doug McL. and Don McL. in Palmerston North until it was handed over to the General Service

Conference at the inaugural meeting of delegates at 'Arahina' on 8 August 1964.

The rooms in Wellington were seen as an essential part of the Intergroup's work. Not only as a place in central Wellington where AAs could meet for mutual support, but also as a base from which the services could be provided. There was always the intention of eventually staffing the rooms on a full-time basis. First mooted at the Intergroup meeting on 26 October 1958, when a fund was set up – £33 donated there and then – it was another two years before rooms were found at 208 Lambton Quay. The rent was guaranteed by thirty members who took out 'debentures' for £5 (some £10) towards furnishings and running expenses. Groups were encouraged to use the rooms and from the outset two groups transferred – the Monday night meeting from St Andrews on The Terrace and the Sunday night group from Lipman St, Courtenay Place.

By 1961 the rooms were open daily, manned by Norah B. In 1964 there was a move to new rooms in the McKenzie Building on Lambton Quay, but the service to AAs continued through these changes in site.

In addition to these activities – the setting up of a tape library, the printing of pamphlets, importing and distributing literature, organising public meetings and working towards the setting up of a permanent office, this Intergroup gradually became the catalyst and focus for a New Zealand wide service set-up. The process was gradual and grew slowly without undue pressure on members. Looking back it is not always easy to understand the difficulties and constraints experienced.

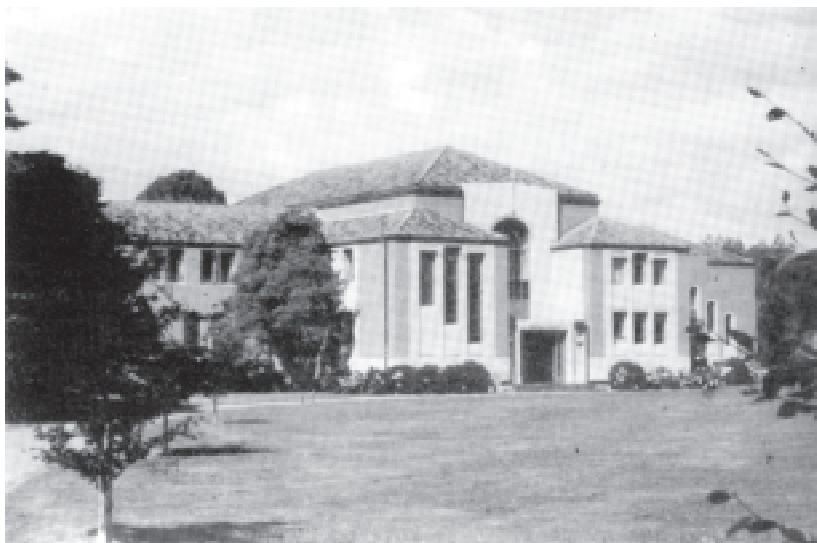
The turning point came with the 13th meeting, held in Hawera on 14 November 1959, when it was agreed that the next meeting be held at 'Arahina' early in March 1960. The venue had already been booked by Alanon but, by agreement, it was arranged that both Alanon and AA Intergroup would hold their separate meetings and combine for an Open Meeting on the evening of Saturday, 5 March. In this way there began an association with Alanon and the earlier informal 'get-togethers' at 'Arahina' merged with the mainstream activities of the fellowship. It was at this meeting, too, that another circle became complete with the announcement of the formation of Canterbury AA Intergroup Service Committee, making all centres within reach of an Intergroup.

The 5 March meeting of Intergroup had perhaps the largest and most representative gathering of AAs so far. Not only members from each group in the province, but also Jim M., Jack P., and Bobby from Auckland, Ted B. from Christchurch, Maurice K., from Canterbury and Murdoch Y., from Dunedin. Ian McE. as Chairman, expressed the hope that, with the progress of AA in New Zealand, it might soon be desirable to form a 'General

Service Committee' so as to give a fuller service to AA groups generally. Whilst it was not the first time that this concept had been raised, the timing was significant in the light of the numbers present and the wide range of groups represented.



Arahina, Marton – Photo: Girl Guides Association



The Refectory Building, Massey University – Photo: Massey University

## Chapter 5

# Mainstay

Whilst there had been early regional AA magazines in the U.S.A. – the *Cleveland Central Bulletin* and the *Los Angeles Eye-Opener* and several others, a new magazine caught on nationally when it first appeared in June 1944. Originally called *Grapevine* the name was later changed to *The AA Grapevine* when it was found that the FBI had an in-hopuse magazine of the same name.<sup>1</sup>

Ian was an early subscriber and it must have been with *The AA Grapevine* in mind that he suggested to two Palmerston North members, Doug and Don that they produce a New Zealand AA magazine. Their main qualifications according to Ian being “Doug’s got the equipment and you both have the time.”

The first issue was one foolscap sheet turned out on the duplicator in the office where Doug worked. Right up until the moment of production a name had not been decided on. Don recalls, “We were on our way to the AA meeting in Petone. In the car were Jack, Margery, Keith, Douglas and myself. We wanted some name which contained two ‘A’s. *MAINBRACE* was mentioned because of the name of a successful racehorse, but it was discarded because *MAINBRACE* also had the flavour of Navy Rum about it. It was Margery who came up with the name *MAINSTAY*.”

Production shifted from Doug’s office to his home where all his family became involved in the despatch.

In retrospect, Doug has this to say about the young magazine:

*“We had advertised that an AA meeting would be at a certain place at a certain time. In the early days generally Don and I were the only ones there, and sometimes when Don had some 12th Stepping to do, I was the only one. But we were determined someone should be there just in case someone else turned up. SOmetimes they did – a car load or two might arrive from anywhere within reach. At one stage we had Stan from Hunterville who would come when he could – that was only an hour’s drive to a meeting. We were glad when other groups adopted this simple thing – that come hell or high water there would be someone at the meeting place at the meeting time. We often headed for Wellington, Lower Hutt or Petone, depending on which night it was,*

*quite confident that someone would be there. And there always was, even though AAs were not numerous then. Mainstay was often described as a meeting in print. There were a lot of loners who so regarded it. Many wrote to say how they appreciated it and waited for it to arrive each month. There is also the other side of the coin, and the 12th Stepping aspect of 'Mainstay' had, I believe, a big bearing on my own sobriety."*<sup>3</sup>

From these small beginnings *Mainstay* grew in size and circulation but always remained a form where AAs could share their experiences. The policy of editorial independence was established from the beginning<sup>4</sup> and the publication solicited contributions and constructive criticism with equal emphasis. Notices of coming events and reports of past happenings had their place, but they were not as important as the sharing of AA experience as it would take place at a meeting.

It had been the intention of the editors that *Mainstay* be held in trust until such time as AA in New Zealand as a whole was able and willing to take the magazine over.<sup>5</sup> Almost ten years were to go by before this happened. There was an early suggestion that it become the responsibility of the Wellington Provincial AA Intergroup Service Committee when this group met for the first time on 15 March 1958, but nothing came of the proposal. Doug and Don carried on as co-editors.<sup>6</sup> It is, in retrospect, fortunate that *Mainstay* remained outside the purview of any one AA coalition. At the inaugural meeting of the delegates to the New Zealand General Service Conference of AA at 'Arahina', Marton on 8 August 1964, AA in New Zealand finally took responsibility for *Mainstay* and the founding co-editors could lay down the task.

A.A. IS OUR

# MAINSTAY

STAY WITH US

June 1, 1965.

P. O. Box 398, Palmerston North.

Vol. 1 No. 1

### In the Cause of A.A. Unity.

Since the arrival of A.A. in this country some ten years ago, through the human agency of our Ian, the Fellowship has extended so as to embrace a quite considerable crowd of people spread over the whole length of our islands.

Some centres have quite surprising numbers (and characters) attending regular meetings, while in numerous places, loners are keeping in contact with the groups by correspondence. Though in Palmerston North we have a group (be it ever so humble), we have effectively sole the isolation of the loner, interspersed with festivals of A.A. when we have gone visiting or have received visitors. We rather like this sharing of the A.A. Fellowship, and hope the idea be extended by way of this small news-sheet.

If all groups will keep us posted on their activities, and send reports of meetings and discussions, we can all better share our gatherings and ideas. The loner can get the benefit of the group discussions and perhaps even contribute to some. We want material of all sorts, so come on, you lucky people, if you can't get a word in edgewise at the meetings, air your opinions here.

\*\*\*\*\*

### The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing.

I went 12th. stepping in response to a letter from a lady whose son was afflicted with our common illness. After talking with the prospect and giving him my story and adding that I had lost all compulsion to drink since I had found A.A. he showed such enthusiasm for his prospects of a new way of life he would insist that I stay for dinner and meet his parents and other members of the family. I enjoyed a sumptuous meal, and Dad and Mum were as pleased as all parents when they see hope for their son's survival. Alcoholics anonymous had an honoured place in their home that day.

Mainstay - The first issue.



The Very Reverend Dr L. M. McFerran (Father Mack)



## Chapter 6

### 1960 to 1964

#### The AA Service Council

##### Part One

On 2 July, 1960 AA world-wide celebrated its 25th Anniversary. Long Beach, Florida was the scene of the Third AA Convention, when some thousands of alcoholics gathered for a time of re-dedication; in this country about 150 AAs and their spouses attended an Anniversary dinner in the Winter Show Buildings, Wellington for both a celebration and a time of dedication and commitment. With so many visitors present the opportunity was taken to discuss the proposed Service Council at an Intergroup meeting held for this purpose during the afternoon preceding the dinner.

The meeting was a watershed. Whilst some reservations remained – Auckland Intergroup were still not keen on the idea of a permanent central office in Wellington – Jack P. from Auckland was the seconder of a motion proposed by Ian McE.:

*“... that a sub-committee comprising one member from each of the four main centres be set up immediately. The elected member in each centre to refer the proposal of a New Zealand Service Board to the various groups in his/her Intergroup area for general discussion at group level. The four subcommittee members to keep in touch with each other by correspondence in the interim, and just as soon as some general agreement is reached, they make arrangements to attend the next meeting of Wellington Intergroup and report.”<sup>1</sup>*

Jack P.'s support for this proposal was significant. When the idea of a Service Council was first mooted, most Auckland members opposed it; the most compelling objection being on the grounds of finance. The new rooms at 78 Albert Street had not long been opened and another call for funds over and above the voluntary contribution system just getting off the ground seemed too much.<sup>2</sup> Whilst Auckland had an Intergroup Committee prior to 1958, it went into recess when there was a conflict between it and the much longer established Twenty Four Hour Club which was a thriving entity as early as 1951<sup>3</sup> – perhaps the first club for AA

members in Australasia. The word 'conflict' is perhaps too harsh. It was more a question of deciding on priorities and the Club was deemed more important at the time. For the same reasons that sparked the formation of the Wellington Intergroup – the supply of literature, contact with the clergy, medical profession and the newly formed National Society on Alcoholism, a Service Centre Committee was set up in Auckland in April 1958.<sup>4</sup>

In the discussions leading up to the decision to proceed with the setting up of the Service Council it was made clear that local Intergroups could have their own offices and that the supply of literature would remain a local concern.

However, the proposed service board would be the 'voice of AA in New Zealand' responsible for broadcasting, arranging newspaper articles on a national basis and the bulk printing of New Zealand inspired literature. By December 1960, Wellington and Canterbury Intergroups had signified approval of the proposal; at the 19th meeting of Wellington AA Intergroup held in Palmerston North on 25 February, 1961 it all came together. Des D. and Frank C., representing the Auckland AA Service Centre spoke of the 'full support given by all the groups in Auckland.' Buck B. from Bay of Plenty reported that all groups in his area were also in agreement and it was decided:

*"That a New Zealand AA General Service Council be formed consisting of two representatives from each Service Centre or Intergroup in New Zealand. The names of the delegates to be forwarded to the Interim Secretary of the NZ General Service Council."*<sup>5</sup>

Wes M. was made the Interim Secretary.

By April 1961 the stage was set – all Intergroups had chosen their representatives:

Auckland Service Committee	Jack P. Jack S.
Bay of Plenty Intergroup	Buck B.
Wellington Intergroup Service Committee	Ian McE. Dick O'D. Jim A.
Canterbury Intergroup Service Committee	Jack McB. Jack K.
Otago Intergroup Service Committee	Ruth W. Jack W.

Because Bay of Plenty appointed only one representative, Wellington, covering a large area and representing the voice of 26 groups, chose a third member, Jim A., to represent the Hawkes Bay, Gisborne and Wairoa districts.<sup>6</sup>

Reflecting on the events leading up to the establishment of the New Zealand AA Service Council made manifest by the election of delegates, it is clear that, whilst all Intergroups were in place by the end of 1959 – Canterbury being the last – the impetus towards the formation of the Council came almost solely from Wellington. Furthermore, the momentum over the years was maintained by a persistent core of AAs within that Intergroup, led by Ian McE., supported by Dick O'D. from Hawera and others who continuously pushed the concept of service in the widest sense. Countering this thrust was a quite strong feeling, held by some AAs up until recent times, that an elaborate set-up, designed for a much larger and more diverse community as found in the United States, should not be imposed on the fellowship in this country. Whilst the structure, as adopted in New Zealand for group and local organisation is based on the parent model, there have been essential differences in approach.

It is as if events in this country were telescoped and some of the lessons learned in the gropings towards unity as experienced in the United States were understood here and some growing pains avoided.

As early as 1938, barely four years after Bill W. and Dr Bob founded AA, the Alcoholic Foundation was set up in New York with a Board of five trustees, three of whom were non-alcoholics.<sup>7</sup> The Board 'mediated' between the fellowship and the world at large but with little connection with AAs except through the co-founders. Between 1945 and 1950 a move was made to transfer the responsibility for the fellowship's service structure from this self-perpetuating unelected body to a General Service Conference of elected delegates. The first was held in New York in April, 1951 'beginning a five year experiment, linking AA's Trustees with the entire fellowship.' It was this concept of a Foundation which Ian McE. had first mooted for AA in New Zealand but at the time he was advocating it, changes were already under way in America. Instead, AA members in New Zealand took responsibility for the service structure and, at a later date invited non-AAs to participate.

The delegates met for the first time in Wellington on 29 July, 1961, elected Ian McE. Chairman and decided that each Service Centre should have three representatives who would serve for a period of three years. Plans were formulated to hold a Dominion-wide AA Conference in Wellington in June or July of 1962. This occasion was seen as an essential opportunity for the Council to report to the whole of the AA fellowship and to seek approval for actions taken.<sup>8</sup>

Then came a hiatus. The Council did not meet again for a year and when it did, it still did not have the names of the Intergroup representatives.<sup>9</sup> In the meantime, Wellington Intergroup accepted responsibility for organising

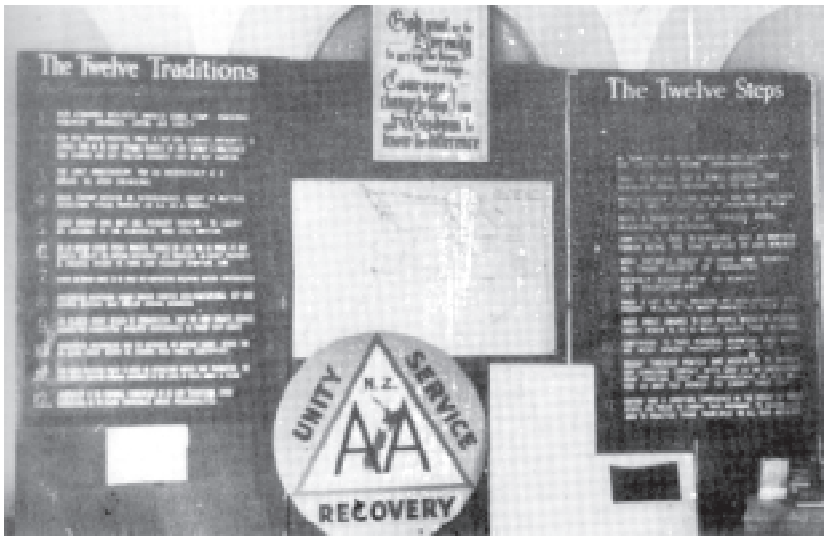
the proposed Convention but this had to be abandoned 'until more general interest was shown in the matter, especially from the South Island.'<sup>10</sup> It all must have been very discouraging, but the Council pressed on and adopted a short and simple list of objectives:

*"... to assist the expansion and development of the fellowship of AA within the Dominion of New Zealand; to co-ordinate the activities of AA Intergroups, Service Centres, groups and individual members in the endeavour to give adequate and fitting expression to the collective group conscience; liaise with General Service Office in New York; liaise with the AA centres in other countries; public relations at a national level and to organise a Dominion Convention every third year in the four main centres."*<sup>11</sup>

Another attempt was made to organise a National Convention, this time for October 1963 to coincide with the projected return visit of Marty Mann, travelling under the auspices of the National Society on Alcoholism. Again, Wellington Intergroup pledged co-operation 'whether Marty Mann's visit eventuated or not.'<sup>12</sup> Once again the arrangements fell through and 1963 went by without the Convention being held. Central Area Assembly at Gisborne on 30 March 1963 called for a Convention, and, taking advantage of the presence of Service Council members, a meeting was held at 'Ulverstone' the following day.

Alanon had booked Massey University in Palmerston North for their own annual gathering on 15 and 16 February 1964. With accommodation available for 300 people, both groups could be easily accommodated and the AA Convention could proceed with a minimum of organisational fuss. At this meeting Ian McE. stepped down as Chairperson and took over as secretary until the Conference. Sel C. of Auckland became Chairman.<sup>13</sup>

On 15th February the Convention was opened by the Mayor of Palmerston North, Gilbert Rennie, in the old Refectory on the Massey University campus. After lunch the plan for the General Service Conference was presented to the 120 AAs gathered. Each Area Assembly representative endorsed the proposal; Ian McE. talked of the early days leading up to the 1961 decision to form a Council whose work to date had culminated in the convening of this, the first New Zealand Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous. It was now over to the membership to give their views. The actual decision was not to be made on the first day, and, as events unfolded, this was just as well. Whilst the weather outside was warm and sunny, inside it soon became hot and stormy. The main sticking point was the likely cost of the Service Conference and many delegates were clearly troubled by the possible burden of another obligation with quite heavy commitments already made to rooms in both Auckland and Wellington.



The Stage, Massey Conference, 1964

The discussion was deadlocked; the atmosphere tense. It was a relief when a local member, Allan B., got up and said, “look, we are all tired, how about adjourning this session, sleeping on what we have heard and coming back fresh in the morning.”

Next morning, Sunday 16 February, tensions had melted away. The whole programme was ratified without delay, and extended in one important respect: Loan McC. of Taihape was appointed as delegate representing the unaffiliated groups and ‘loners’.

Reflecting on the events of the weekend the tensions were understandable. Very early, AA had the choice of either moving towards the sort of central authoritarian structure most organisations opt for, or remaining perpetually open and flexible with a minimum of central control. Apart from the devices of rotating committees with limited authority, the clear understanding in terms of Tradition Four that ‘each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole,’ there are, in the words of Bill W., “... two authorities which are far more effective (than human authority). One is benign, the other malign.”<sup>14</sup> The first is set out in the Second Tradition: ‘For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience ...’ The second is alcohol itself, ‘cunning, baffling, powerful.’ Faced with these

\* See Appendix – First N.Z. Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous

choices – abstinence through the AA programme, or insanity and possible death, the drinking alcoholic has no need of any other discipline if he or she wants to recover.

Perhaps it was as much to remind themselves as the fellowship that the letterhead of the New Zealand General Service Conference of AA has at the top the words ‘Our leaders are but rusted servants; they do not govern’.

Those who participated in this historic gathering could leave secure in the knowledge that they had heeded the words of Bill W.:

*“We must think deeply of all those sick ones still to come to AA. As they try to make their return to faith and to life, we want them to find everything in AA that we have found, and yet more, if that is possible. No care, no vigilance, no effort to preserve AA’s constant effectiveness and spiritual strength will ever be too great to hold us in full readiness for the day of their homecoming.”<sup>15</sup>*

Something more had been added to the life of AA in New Zealand. Over the following pages we will be looking at the work of the Service Conference in more detail.

## Chapter 6

### 1965 to 1976

#### The AA Service Council

##### Part Two

Armed with the authority vested in them by the first Conference of AA in New Zealand, the delegates moved into action. They met for the first time at 'Arahina' on 8 August 1964, coming together from all over New Zealand, from Bill H. of Kaitia to Bill L.-S. of Christchurch. True to the spirit of openness in AA, about 50 members who were attending Central Area Assembly came as observers.

On this occasion *Mainstay* was handed over to the fellowship by editor Doug Mcl. of Palmerston North. So ended a ten-year stewardship during which time the co-editors had always regarded themselves as 'trustees' of the publication until the fellowship was ready to take it over. This time had now come. A small committee – Doug Mcl., Snow C., Dick O'D. and Ian McE. was appointed to edit, manage and publish the magazine.

Another forward step was taken at this meeting. Having elected a small steering committee to act between meetings\* it was asked to carry out a number of tasks in the field of public relations; an area most central to the functions of the General Service Conference. We have seen how, almost twenty years earlier, Ian McE. had begun, virtually single-handed, the work of bringing AA before the public, especially those groups most likely to have contact with the drinking alcoholic: doctors, employers, clergy. Ian had also made frequent approaches to the press and worked with radio stations. We have seen how lone AA's in various towns and cities carried this work forward; how the groups they formed in the early 1950's enlisted community support by fostering good relations with the medical profession, social workers, police and other agencies.

The spirit of co-operation varied with individual groups and there were some who persisted in maintaining that AA had all the answers to alcoholism and that membership in the fellowship provided the only

\* Chairman Sel C., Auckland, Bill L.-S., Christchurch and Ian McE as secretary.

solution to a drinking problem. It was true, that in the early days, AA members, with limited resources, were called upon to perform many tasks like nursing alcoholics through the DT's because there was no-one else available.<sup>1</sup> Now, with the entry of many health professionals into the field of alcoholism and a more enlightened attitude towards the sufferer, AA could more easily concentrate on its main objective. To counter some of the parochialism within AA, Bill W., in a March 1958 article in *The AA Grapevine*, talked of the need to co-operate with our 'friends on the alcoholism front' and cited many people whose contribution in the areas of medicine, psychiatry and public education had done so much to advance treatment and understanding. The Traditions focus on the policy of 'co-operation but non-affiliation'\* that AA has adopted.

*"They remind AAs to place the welfare of the fellowship above personal desires; that no AA member can tell other AA's what they should or should not do; that the primary aim of the fellowship is to carry the message of AA to the still suffering alcoholic; that no AA group either endorses or opposes any other enterprise and that power and prestige are eschewed lest the accompanying problems do harm to the fellowship; that AA is not to be drawn into public argument; that membership comes through attraction and mention is never made in the public media about anyone's membership in AA. Lastly, the Traditions serve to remind the fellowship to place AA principles above personalities."*<sup>2</sup>

AA therefore, seeks to co-operate and to work alongside other agencies in the field. Precisely because of their knowledge and understanding of alcoholism, many AAs have been drawn to full time paid work in this field. There is no impediment to an AA member, as a private individual, taking an active part in treatment and other programmes provided always that this is done on the basis of their professional standing, and not on their membership in AA. Those who wear two hats need to be very clear at all times whether, in any situation, they are acting in the paid (non-AA) job or functioning as a member.

The second aspect of public relations activity relates to one of the central concepts of AA – anonymity. Whilst anonymity is frequently important to the new member who is thereby protected at a tender stage of his or her sobriety, the Eleventh Tradition sets out clearly the *level* at which the line is drawn – in the *public* media – press, radio, TV and films. It was not always like this. The Tradition has come out of harsh experience. Because of the stigma attached to alcoholism, there were benefits pertaining to anonymity for many, but, more importantly, anonymity was seen by the

\* See Appendix 4 for a list of AA Publications that aid Co-operation



fellowship as a necessary personal sacrifice for the benefit of the whole. When AA was just beginning in the United States there were some notable recoveries through the programme made by people who were already public figures. Their stories made good newspaper copy, and through this publicity, there was an upsurge of interest and an increase in membership. It seemed that nothing but good must flow from such activities. The co-founder himself was not immune to the temptation to tell his story in public, disclosing his full name. Then came problems. The giving of oneself to others in through the AA programme demands nothing in return. If there is a reward, it is through one's own continued sobriety, not fame, adulation and public attention. There were those who, with sobriety gained, wanted to sponsor hospitals, mount educational campaigns, solicit funds for alcohol research programmes, take sides in the 'wet-dry' controversy, all using the AA name in the process. Not only was the society being drawn into public controversy but also, for many, the old drives for power and prestige resurfaced.

Therefore, the need for anonymity at the general public level was recognised, accepted, and, since those early days, nearly always maintained. The refusal to publicise the names of leaders and members has worked for AA in another way. The fellowship has always enjoyed fair and accurate publicity – the news outlets find a refreshing change in reporting the doings of an organisation which is not wedded to the modern cult of personality. Besides, the great, famous and articulate are no more representative of AA than the most obscure member – it is 'a society of equals'.<sup>3</sup>

We have talked of the efforts made by groups to bring their existence and activities to the notice of the public. When Intergroups were formed they carried this process on a stage further. Wellington Provincial AA Intergroup Service Committee experimented from 1958 onwards with a weekly advertisement in Wellington newspapers giving group meeting times and places. Each group was asked for 5/- per week to cover costs, but those unable to pay at the outset were included until such time as they were able to contribute. Money remained a problem and at the peak when eleven groups were included in the advertisement only five outside the city area made donations towards the cost. After three years the contract with the *Dominion* was cancelled at the end of 1961 but reinstated two years later.

It is customary at public meetings to solicit donations to defray expenses. Not so on these occasions. Either the chairperson made an announcement that the only people able to put money in the hat were AA members or, alternatively, no donations were asked for at all to avoid the possibility of 'outside contributions'.

With the advent of the AA Service Council of New Zealand, the emphasis and direction taken in the area of public relations changed. Now, for the first time, there was one voice to speak on matters affecting the whole fellowship.

The importance of the press has never been underestimated. In spite of the struggle to find the money, the Wellington Provincial AA Intergroup Service Committee maintained the contract advertisements in the Wellington newspapers for some years from the time the Intergroup was first set up and we have now seen how significant press notices and articles have been in steering many alcoholics towards their first contact with AA. Arrangements were made to see a number of people, prominent in Government Departments active in the care and treatment of alcoholics. Interviews took place on 17 September 1964 with Dr Robson, Secretary for Justice, Mr Williams, Acting Director of Prisons and Mr Watt, Chief Probation Officer for New Zealand who were advised of the formation of the steering committee as the official link with AA. Establishing this link was as important as the review of Justice Department policy in respect of prison release, attendance at AA meetings and other matters of common concern.

Later in the same day our group met with Dr Mirams, who had a deep understanding of and sympathy for AA, from the very early days.<sup>4</sup> He was accompanied by Drs Turbot and Blake-Palmer. The policy of admitting alcoholics to General Hospitals was discussed and an undertaking was given by Dr Turbot that this would be placed on the agenda of the Hospital Superintendants' Conference to be held in April, 1965, when the Department's wishes in this matter would be made clear, bearing in mind the autonomy of the different Boards and the varying resources each might have available for patients with special needs such as alcoholics.<sup>5</sup> Dr Mirams also talked about the provisions of the impending Alcoholism Act and the importance of understanding and education at the public level.

A pattern of activity began to take shape. The Steering Committee met less often and the full meetings of delegates was held twice a year – the day before the annual New Zealand Assembly held alternately at Massey University and Lincoln College when delegates reported to the full membership; the second occasion midway in the year at 'Arahina'.

Ian McE., now fully occupied as Secretary and *Mainstay* editor, was joined by Peter G. as assistant Secretary; the latter working on the first New Zealand Directory of AA groups.

By August 1965 the General Service Conference was ready to agree, at least in principle, that the literature, presently administered by Snow C., the Central Area Assembly Secretary, be purchased and taken over, but

the final decision was deferred until the New Zealand Conference set down for 5-6 February 1966 at Massey University.

At this time, too, preparations were made to welcome Eve M., visiting New Zealand between 19 December, 1965 and 7 January, 1966. Eve, on 12 months leave of absence from G.S.O., New York where she had been working for many years, planned to visit as many countries as possible. Whilst the timing was unfortunate, the best use was made of her knowledge and experience in AA.

Overseas visitors have played a crucial role in the growth of AA in New Zealand. In August 1947 Lillian Roth and Burt M. were the first AAs Ian was to meet. Alcoholics Anonymous began in Australia through the efforts of two non-AAs and one AA, all working at Rydalmere Mental Hospital in Sydney: Dr Sylvester M., a psychiatrist; Father Dunlea, a priest; and Arch McKinnon, an attendant. Dr Sylvester corresponded with G.S.O. in New York for two years before the first Australian AA group was formed at the hospital late in 1944.<sup>6</sup>

Three years later, Dr Sylvester was in New Zealand and such was his reputation for sympathy and understanding for AAs that Ian was convinced, until their meeting, that this doctor was a member of the fellowship. Ian was right! During those early visits to this country the doctor was speaking in his professional capacity which was reinforced by a special empathy with those suffering from alcoholism. Years later, Dr Sylvester M. became a member of AA. Doctor Mirams, then a medical officer at Sunnyside Hospital, recalls Ian and Dr Sylvester calling on him in 1947 when the two were 'travelling through New Zealand trying to get some beginnings to AA.'<sup>7</sup> Dr Sylvester made a number of visits to this country and did much to increase public understanding of alcoholism.

In her letters to Ian, Bobbie B., in addition to giving him the names of struggling AAs in other countries he could write to and share with them his experiences in starting out, also put him in touch with AAs visiting New Zealand, frequently in the course of their work. In a letter dated 27 April, 1949, Bobbie wrote: "You may have a treat in store for you soon. My very good friend, Captain Jack S. is the Captain of the S.S. Stanvac Durban owned by the Socony Vacuum Oil Co. Jack writes to me that he expects to be in New Zealand some time soon and is going to be in touch with you if at all possible. Jack is one of the finest AAs I have ever had the privilege of knowing and I do want you two to meet. Jack can tell you lots about us in New York and when he returns, he can do the same for me about you." Captain Jack was well known in AA. Bill W. talks of 'Captain Jack in a Standard Oil tanker, spreading AA as he sailed.'<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, two women visitors to this country, Marty Mann and Lillian

Roth, were two prominent AAs in widely different fields, who broke their anonymity at a public level 'for the sake of others', and whilst no apparent harm came from these episodes, which happened in the 1940s, the experience gained led to a strengthening of the Tradition on anonymity. The late Marty Mann, a patient of Dr Tiebout, was the first woman in AA and later went on to become the founder and Executive Director of the National Council on Alcoholism – the American counterpart of our National Society on Alcohol and Drug Dependency. It was under the auspices of the latter Society that Marty Mann made her second visit to New Zealand in 1963. Eve M., at the very centre of G.S.O. work had very valuable experiences to share on her New Zealand visit, brief though it was, and a taped discussion with local members made in 1966 has relevance even today.\*

Whilst these events were taking place in New Zealand, AA itself was celebrating its 30th Anniversary at an International Convention, held for the first time outside the United States in Toronto, Canada, on 2-4 July, 1965. The Toronto Declaration affirmed the need for service and the tasks yet unfinished in these words:

***“I am responsible, when anyone, anywhere reaches out for help,  
I want the hand of AA always to be there,  
and for that I am responsible.”***

*“And yet, as Bill W. has recently pointed out in ‘The AA Grapevine’, millions of dying alcoholics have never yet heard of AA’s language of the heart, do not even know where it is spoken.*

*“Will someone be here to speak it to them when they come?*

*“That responsibility is yours and mine. For that reason, no AA Anniversary can ever be just a reminder of the past. For the sake of the next sick drunk who comes in the door, and for the sake of tomorrow’s sobriety for all of us, the AA story must never end yesterday, but always be Beginning ...”<sup>9</sup>*

With the service framework in place we come to the last ten years of our history – the period 1966 to 1976. AA in New Zealand has been responsive to changing needs and the service structure has responded in significant ways. Let us look at the areas of activity which engaged the attention of ‘our trusted servants’ over this decade...

\* See Appendix 5.

## Literature

In February 1966, Snow C., representing Central Area Assembly, passed the entire stock (about \$500.00 worth) to the New Zealand General Service Conference who were ready to take over this responsibility.

For almost 20 years Central Area Assembly had imported and distributed AA literature for all who needed it. Other Area Assemblies, notably Auckland, had followed suit. Snow C. agreed to continue giving his expertise and advice by attending to all details of Customs entries and overseas payments.

The following year there was discussion on producing literature in New Zealand, but it was not felt opportune to do anything on a large scale and only a few small items were printed here.

In September, 1968, a General Service Office was rented in Wellington and a convenient and efficient service established for the despatch of books and pamphlets from a very complete stock. By 1974 increased prices and an unfavourable exchange rate forced the cancellation of imports from Australia and most books and pamphlets were received from America.

In 1973 the General Service Conference decided that, in future, only Conference approved literature would be stocked. The Auckland Service Centre is now the only source of supply for literature from other sources and enquiries are directed to them.

In a report to the World Service Meeting, 5-7 October, 1978, it was stated: "Over the years since 1966 the quantity of imports and distribution of AA books and pamphlets has gone on increasing to the stage where now a stock of \$12,000 is held at G.S.O. and the literature account is now able to pay \$1,200 a year into the Conference Account. In 1975, 25,000 pieces of literature were despatched from G.S.O. which is more than treble what it was in 1966."

## Pamphlets

The range of pamphlets printed in New Zealand, *This is Alcoholics Anonymous, Who Me?, A Doctor's Approach, Emotional Sobriety*, a letter by Bill W. and various wallet cards, was extended in 1973 with the publication of the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions and the Serenity Prayer in Maori.

Jim M., a pakeha alcoholic with twenty-six years of sobriety, spent six years, assisted by sympathetic Maori and Islander friends, getting material

from two AA pamphlets – *Is AA for You?* and *This is AA* translated into six languages – Maori, Tongan, Niuean, Samoan, Rarotongan and Fijian. His addiction to alcohol wrecked his first marriage to a Niuean girl in spite of the help with his problem he received from her family. A subsequent marriage to a woman of joint European/Fijian ancestry too, was threatened by the wilder shores of booze, but with his entry into AA came a desire to repay a debt to his Islander friends. Close family contacts and travels in the South Pacific had given him an understanding of their cultures and the damage alcohol can do to them. A Pakeha friend, John, also married to a Pacific Islander, joined him in setting up the South Sea Island Group, where people from these societies could feel relaxed and be at home. John said of his efforts, “Information about alcoholism in English is not much help to people whose native languages have no word for that problem. It was essential, I thought, for them to have the facts set out clearly in their own tongues.”<sup>10</sup>

The new office at 175 Vivian Street, Wellington, was both a challenge and a burden. In spite of every effort to publicise the existence of and the work undertaken by the office – storage and despatch of literature, secretarial work and the printing of *Mainstay* – appeals for funding on the suggested basis of \$1.00 per year for every member, produced disappointing results initially. Delegates to the Conference were asked to make themselves known to all groups in their area and to be willing to discuss with them the operations of the General Service Conference. In August 1968, Ian McE. was appointed Executive Officer at a modest salary. The volume of work undertaken began to build up and, for a period during 1971-72, Graham M. helped Ian on a part-time basis. In August 1972, Ian’s resignation as Executive Officer was received with great regret. He had suffered his first stroke, which forced him to reduce the level of his activities.

At the August 1974 meeting of the Conference, David M. was appointed full-time Office Manager. The decision to go ahead was based partly on improved communications from 1973 with a flow-on effect on the Conference’s finances, and, partly on the knowledge that, with faith, funding would be forthcoming. It had always been stressed to members that, ‘these services were not a new development, but the normal extension of services that we always needed and have given since AA began in New Zealand in 1946.’<sup>11</sup>

In the year 1972/73 the Conference finances doubled, individual donations increased by one-third and a reserve fund, to be added to as finances permitted, was set up. At the same time, the fellowship continued to support central Intergroup offices in each of the four main centres with paid secretarial help offering a range of services in support of local groups.

In August, 1966, a guide for the conduct of General Service Conferences was received from New York raising, not for the first time, the proposal of non-AA membership of the Conference. In spite of a mixed response from Area Assemblies it was decided to go ahead. Seen as essential to the success of the project was the need to attract people who would be much more than figureheads, who would be able to attend Conferences at Massey and Lincoln, give of their time and interest, be known nationally, be willing to make contact with their non-AA counterparts in overseas Conferences, and above all, have empathy for AA. A tall order indeed! By August the following year three people fulfilling these criteria had been appointed – Mr Russell Laurenson, a Wellington businessman, past Governor of Rotary and a member of the Broadcasting Corporation; Sir John Walsh, past president of NSAD and Dean of the Dental School, Otago University; and Father McFerran, Director Family Guidance Centre, Anglican City Mission, Auckland and previously Director of the Alcoholism Foundation of British Columbia. Regretfully, Sir John Walsh was forced to retire a year later. Subsequent non-AA members have been Dr Fraser McDonald, Dr John Robson and Dr G. Wall, M.P.



Dr John Robson



Dr Gerry Wall, M.P.

# **The Coming of Age of Alcoholics Anonymous in New Zealand**

*By The Very Rev. Dr. L.M. McFerran*

The coming of age of Alcoholics Anonymous in New Zealand and my own 21 years of association with the Fellowship coincided with my being asked to serve as a non-alcoholic member of the General Service Board. Since my first accompanying of a sick alcoholic to an AA meeting in Toronto, Canada in 1946, held in the basement of a church, suitably named after the saint of lost causes, St Jude, I had spent a great part of my priestly ministry fellowshiping with alcoholics. Like another Episcopalian priest, Dr Samuel Shoemaker, I marvelled at how God had, through AA, “come to ordinary men and women with a great need who had found a great Answer and who did not hesitate to make it known wherever they could”. I also recognised that in a sense the invitation for non-alcoholics to share in the work of the General Service Board was another turning point in the development of the Fellowship in N.Z. I accepted this opportunity to serve the suffering alcoholic as a great privilege and honour.

I remember that period of 1968-70 of sharing with another non-alcoholic, Russell Laurenson, as a time of not just being a helper but as real partners within the Fellowship. We were asked by the General Service Board to share insights, make recommendations and to do some public relations on behalf of the Fellowship. We were reminded that the original co-founders, Bill W. and Dr Bob, envisaged the sharing non-alcoholic as being “a voice for AA”. Russell diligently set about to initiate and produce a TV program that would publicise AA, while at the same time keeping the anonymity of the participating members. My own role was a good deal more at the grass roots level within the community. During 1969 I recall giving some 187 addresses to community and church groups and writing numerous articles for national papers and periodicals in which much of the emphasis was given to the movement of AA. I attempted to visit as many AA open meetings and institutional groups as I could, in the three Area Assemblies. It was a privilege to attend over 100 meetings of the Fellowship and be asked even to chair the public meeting of the Annual Convention at Massey in February 1969.

It was a time of exceptional growth of the Fellowship in N.Z. I recall Ian M. telling me when I came to share on the General Service Board that there were some 85 AA groups with about 1100 members throughout N.Z. During the next few years dozens of additional groups were formed and the membership literally blossomed. It is the people of principle in the movement that makes it all work. I owe a personal debt to both N.Z.



founders, Ian M. and Alf J., as well as to Lindsay M., Selwyn C., Jim C., and Jimmy M., and many others who guided me during my time on the Board. We were blessed at the time to have had Bill L-S. as our Board Chairman. One of his philosophical concepts rubbed off on to me. "Never do anything which cannot be undone if need be." After the establishing of a General Service Office in Wellington in 1968 the non-alcoholic partners were great supporters of the Fellowship's decision to participate in the First World Service Meeting in New York in 1969.

My time on the General Service Board was a productive time of learning. The wisdom of AA in working from the individual alcoholic through the group conscience up/down via the delegates to the Board and not the other way around. The power of principles rather than the influence of personalities, regardless of the charismatic characters found within the Fellowship. Implementing policy not on the basis of the force of a majority or even of settling for a compromise but the strength of the Fellowship is sufficient that it can afford to delay changes until it is accepted that such changes respond to the needs of all AA members.

One of the highest accolades that I ever received was to read in the periodical *Box 459* of the General Service Office of AA New York "The appointment of three non-alcoholics, well known men with time to devote to AA has been and unqualifies success." I shall always be grateful for the trust that the Fellowship has accorded to me in their spirit of graciousness. Thank God Alcoholics Anonymous continues to be an inspiration to all of us who are concerned and care for our fellowmen.

*J. by ack.*

\* \* \*

The door was opened on wider horizons in 1968 with the receipt, from New York, of the suggestion that AA take the first step towards the formation of a World Service Conference. New York felt that many problems of growth, public relations, anonymity, self support, literature printing and distribution, relations with treatment centres, required an exchange of information and experience at an international level. Whilst agreeing to the proposal in principle, members felt unable to do more in the meantime, lest funds be diverted from unsatisfied domestic needs. As it transpired, New Zealand did not miss out on this important event – at the February 1969 meeting of the General Service Conference at Lincoln College, Ian McE. and Irvan T. from Timaru were elected delegates to the New York World Service Conference. This country has continued its representation ever since at this biennial event.

The statement has been made that 'AA is fellowship as well as programme' whilst we have been looking at the way in which the programme has been set up to carry through the wishes of the members, we have still only been talking about the framework, the bones, as it were, not really the substance – the fellowship. More than once Bill W. has talked of the fellowship as a family. He talks of "the kinship of suffering ... the language of the heart ..." and the idea of AA as home "... for the sake of the next drunk who comes in the door ..." the images of community resonate. The system is simple and fluid. No move is made without substantial backing from members and nothing is done which cannot easily be undone. Apart from simple 'bylaws' incorporating the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and some clauses setting out periods of service and replacement of delegates, there is little in the way of rules as most organisations have them.<sup>12</sup>

Power in organisations lies totally in relationships; it is impossible for a person or group of people to exercise power in isolation. The central concept of power can be expressed simply by saying that I have power over another when I can get that person to do something he or she would not otherwise do. That is, my power lies in the other person's dependency. But when the alcoholic makes the admission that he is powerless over alcohol, that his life is unmanageable, and that he needs the fellowship to restore him to the human race, the answer comes back clearly that the fellowship needs him. As Ernest Kurtz has put it, the essence of AA is 'the sacred honesty of mutual vulnerability openly acknowledged.' "Alcoholics," Bill W. was fond of saying, "are all or nothing people."

Whatever personal reasons a person may use to drink to excess – to gain control, to transcend his human condition, to iron out life's problems, he can become trapped in a world growing increasingly unreal as normal human relationships slip away. Physical, mental and spiritual dependence on alcohol follows. The very medium chosen to enhance life becomes the agent of its destruction. AA instinctively moved away from the Oxford Group's 'Four Absolutes' on the grounds that there were special dangers for the alcoholic with his obsessive drive to perfection of 'going broke on this sort of perfection – trying to get too good by Thursday,'" and other of Bill W.'s expressions. Rather, AA promoted a doctrine of sweet reasonableness, and in many pamphlets and tin the books, mainly written by Bill W., counselled growth and progress, rather than an expectation of 100% success from the word go.

One of the keys to organisational success is to be very clear about objectives. The more simply and precisely these can be stated, the greater the chance that everyone in the organisation will understand them and be able to play their part in seeing that they are achieved. The first objective of AA

says nothing about the recovering alcoholic, has no word on sobriety. Instead, quite clearly:

*“Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity.”*

Without AA unity the alcoholic seeking help would not have the fellowship to turn to. Within the fellowship there are no rules, only suggested courses of action based on experience. Long before the counter-culture of the 1960's sought to give organisations a human face and to make them more responsive to the needs of those they were set up to serve, AA in Father Edward Dowling's words, 'has proved that democracy is therapy.'<sup>13</sup> Dr Fraser McDonald has described AA as 'a potent amalgam of theocracy, dictatorship, democracy and anarchy in which each alcoholic feels a real part of the organisation ...' and he goes on to say '... astonishing similarities to what I am sure the theologians of the Christian Church were fumbling towards when they spoke about people being 'a part of the body of Christ'.<sup>14</sup>

The prime unit is the AA group, totally autonomous except in matters affecting the fellowship as a whole. The fellowship, which is the organisation's reason for being is embodied in the smallest unit. The larger coalitions exist to service these groups whose attention is focussed on the next drunk who comes in the door. There is no power, only service. So loose is the organisation that, although some form of incorporation has been considered from time to time, it has not been thought necessary to proceed.

Our story ends as it began with the 30th Anniversary Dinner at Massey University on 2 February 1976. Ian McE.'s story was told first – we now give the talk by Dr T.C. Maling, then Senior Medical Officer, Queen Mary Hospital, Hamner.

*“I stand here with very mixed feelings. I feel very honoured to be asked to propose this toast tonight. I am very conscious of my limitations and this makes me somewhat nervous, but also I sense that I am among friends, and this gives me a lot of comfort.*

*My first contact with AA was some 26-27 years ago, when I was deputising for our Superintendent at Queen Mary and a message came through to me saying that a Mr McE. wished to see me. In came a very large, fit-looking man, who sat down opposite me and told me something about what had happened to him and of his recovery. Now at this stage I didn't know what an alcoholic was. I didn't have any alcoholic patients; alcoholism meant absolutely nothing to me. So I only hope that Ian was not too disappointed with my reaction that day. It makes me blush when I think how interested I must have appeared.*

*However, time went by and in the space of the next year or so I did have my first alcoholic patient, but again I was abysmally ignorant and, again as time went by, I had a second alcoholic patient, but somehow this one was different, as far as I was concerned. This one had really plumbed the depths of despair and degradation. He had drunk himself out of his practice. He was a doctor. He had been in various institutions and when he came to us I can remember him telling me that in all the dark and depressing times he had been through, there was just one ray of hope, and this had come through his contact with AA. So I began to prick up my ears a little bit and began to ask him a few questions. I read though the Big Book – there was not a great deal of literature about at the time other than the Big Book – and I gradually began to learn some of the needs of the alcoholic in recovery.*

*At this stage AA was really in its infancy but we were very fortunate to have some very dedicated members in Christchurch. We were 80 miles away and we use to badger people into organising transport to send down a car load to Christchurch, but this was not always a success, because some of my clients had other ideas as to how they were going to spend their time. However, these good AA friends in Christchurch kept coming up to us and they shared their experience with the patients we had in the hospital and, I am glad to say that this service has been continued, and expanded, and is still a very precious thing to us in Hamner and to me it is a living example of AA at work in the community. Gradually, with the help of these people in Christchurch, we were able to establish our own meeting in the hospital. At the time I am speaking about we had now grown to a minimum of three or four alcoholic patients and gradually as we rehabilitated them, as we used to do in those days both in jobs in the hospital and in jobs in the village, some of these people felt the need for their own group. Originally this started in a private home and from there in 1960 it spread to a regular Wednesday night meeting in the Anglican Church Hall in Hanmer. These meetings still continue today. Early last year the local group thought it necessary to have an additional meeting and they started one every Sunday evening.*

*Now, at the time I have been speaking about, Queen Mary was a hospital which dealt with what used to be called “Functional Nervous Disorders”. That is to say, people who were tense or anxious or depressed, but gradually, over the years, the number of these declined and the number of people with drinking problems increased until finally, a few years ago, we had to make a decision that we would not take any patients other than those who had a drinking problem. The scheme we evolved placed particular emphasis on what we considered were three*

fundamental aspects of recovery in a hospital setting and these were Education, Group Therapy and Alcoholics Anonymous. I don't think that, speaking for myself, I would want to change any of those today.

If AA is one of the essential main components of treatment, as we see it to be, then I think it follows that the main objective in treatment is sobriety. All of us who have an experience in treating the alcoholic know that there are occasions when alcoholics can have a drink without leading to uncontrolled drinking, and I think too that all of us engaged in trying to help the alcoholic can recall a few patients who have seemingly been unable to control their drinking.

In my own experience, I could count these on the fingers of one hand. And I use the word "seemingly" because in this context I want to tell you a little about one particular patient, because to me there is a very big message here. Quite simply, this was a man who was in Hamner on two occasions. There was an interval of eight years between his admissions. When he came back the second time, he told me that he had had five years when he had not had a drink at all and then he had gone back to trying to control his drinking in the last three years. When he sobered up again and was thinking straight, he said to me, "If you had asked me two years ago if I was controlling my drinking I would have said 'yes', but today I have quite a different idea about it. Those first five years when I put alcohol out of my life I was free and I was relaxed and I was contented. For the last three years it has been a continuing struggle and I have been tense and I can see now that those years did not compare at any stage with my earlier years when I had put alcohol right out of my mind." I thought there was a pretty big message in this for most alcoholics, but I suppose it is the wish of every alcoholic, early in the treatment, to be able to control his drinking.

My own view is that with things the way they are in the treatment of alcoholism today, it is much easier for the alcoholic to learn to live a sober life than it is for the alcoholic to attempt to try and learn on what occasions it might be safe for him to have a drink.

I have endeavoured to outline, as briefly as I can, the growth of AA in one small part of this country, in Hamner, because this is the area I know, but what has happened there has been repeated throughout this country and I think that the seed which I imported from America thirty years ago is well and truly planted. It has grown into a substantial tree and many of you here tonight are the fruit of that tree. I have no doubt whatsoever in my mind about the value of AA and I would go along with Dr Ruth Fox who said that, in her view, the best treatment for alcoholism was Alcoholics Anonymous and she urged that every sufferer from this illness should be encouraged to join this group. An

*alcoholic in recovery needs a continuing support group. He needs a group that is going to remind him of his predicament. He needs a group that is going to keep him cut down to size, and AA provides all of these, as well as understanding, fellowship and friendship. All of this was said much better than I can say it, by one of the founders of AA two years before the message came to New Zealand when Bill said, "AA is a Society where men and women understand each other and where we can learn enough of patience, tolerance, honesty, humility and service to subdue our former masters, insecurity, resentments and unsatisfied dreams of power.*

*Ladies and gentleman, I give you the toast, "Alcoholics Anonymous".*

## Chapter 8

# Alcoholics Anonymous

**Dr Fraser McDonald**

**Superintendent, Carrington Hospital, Auckland**

As all of those involved in the treatment of alcoholics realise, the main problem is not getting them off alcohol (any halfwit can do that and indeed every alcoholic has done it himself innumerable times). No, the main problem is to:

- a) Keep them off alcohol for the rest of their life, and
- b) stop them from being the destructive psychopath.

This seems to be a remarkably tall order and indeed it has been the main reason why, by and large, psychiatrists have washed their hands of the treatment of alcoholism using various excuses or cop-outs, such as, “the patient doesn’t want treatment” or “he’s a psychopath” or “he is incurable”. These excuses must be firmly resisted and must be recognised for what they are and this surely must be the only disease where the patient is asked to get rid of all his symptoms before he is acceptable for treatment. What we need for the therapeutic process is:

- a) A complete change in his value system, or his moral system if you like, in order to try and turn him from a taker into a giver, from a greedy self-lover to a generous other-lover. By this I don’t only mean the sexual aspect of love, but this applies very much to the sexual aspects of his life. I think most of us are agreed that the rather simple-minded Freudian theory that homosexuality was at the basis of alcoholism is now not held by anybody, but their sexuality is certainly extremely disturbed in that they appear to be neither homosexual nor properly heterosexual but more asexual, or more accurately what the Professor of Moral Theology, I think it was, in Rome, said to a young priest in training, ‘that what he hoped to do with the priest who was training was to turn them into something that was not hetero, not homo, but monosexual’.
- b) He has to get his emotions unfrozen. One of the characteristic things about alcoholics in treatment is that one sees that their emotional life appears to have been put into the deep freeze, or if you like,

pickled in alcohol at the time they started their heavy drinking so that one is presented with a patient aged perhaps 45 but with the emotional life of a 17-year old. It is quite obvious that they have stopped growing at the time alcohol acted as an anaesthetic to the usual growth processes in emotional life in that alcohol anaesthetised all the pain and anxiety which are usually the preludes to us forming new solutions to new problems. What we had to do is provide them with a speedy growing up process to enable them to do the adult things such as:

- i) to learn to trust themselves and others.
  - ii) to postpone the satisfaction of immediate desires in favour of later satisfactions, i.e. time-binding.
  - iii) to be able to bear guilt and emotional pain with some equanimity.
  - iv) to bear the fact that they have imperfections as against the terrible destructive perfectionism which has plagued their unsatisfied lives up until now.
  - v) to bear to let others take the centre stage at times.
  - vi) to become a nurturer rather than a clamourer for nurture, i.e., a parent rather than a baby.
  - vii) to become responsible for their actions without blaming others for their failures or inability to reach the unrealistic goals they have had for themselves in the past.
  - viii) to deal with reality rather than the fantasies of their guilty past or glorious future, both delusional to marked degree during their drinking days.
- c) This process must be understandable to men who are frequently brain damaged and often with imperfect education – it must be in simple terms with no psychiatric jargon. This could well apply to psychiatric textbooks incidentally. As I said before, this seems to be a very tall order but, amazingly enough, AA seems to be able to deliver it. I would like to now touch on some of the healing psychological mechanism present in the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

### **Step 1 – We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.**

This is a very powerful psychological mechanism – note the ‘we’, not the ‘you’ or ‘I’. This attacks especially the terrifying psychopathic certainty and arrogance of the active alcoholic. the tremendous self-love and that dreadful feeling of being solely responsible for themselves and yet hating



their responsibility and wanting to abdicate it all the time with alcoholic oblivion. Also the terrifying loneliness almost akin to God-like loneliness caused by the appalling drive of their super-ego which makes them identify with those wildly unrealistic ideals which are really making him identify with God himself, a state in which nothing can be more destructive. It aims to attack their terrible feelings of wanting to be powerful and competent which are never satisfied. What this Step does for them is to release them from that terrible burden and it is very necessary that they surrender completely and abrogate responsibility for themselves in a rather delicate mechanism which enables them to think "I am now responsible (but not solely) for my life and I am not responsible for my alcoholism". This is a state of mind which is quite necessary for any sort of recovery from alcoholism and this Step therefore is a most important one. This is the first Step in the absolutely right-angled change of life style which they must adopt, akin to what Jung speaks of as the massive shift in the direction of their whole life.

### **Step 2 – Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**

This is most important for putting the responsibility for the change in life onto something outside themselves and also forcing them to swallow the unpleasant truth that, in fact, as far as alcohol is concerned they are quite insane. The massive change in psychological emphasis of having to believe in something non-rational and something beyond their own competence is a cruelly necessary step to humble them sufficiently to enable them to rejoin the human race, imperfect as it is.

### **Step 3 – Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.**

This, perhaps, is more difficult for the doctors who are treating alcoholics to swallow than for the alcoholic himself, as most people in the therapeutic field have been trained in the basically materialist sense which has been the basis of 'science' and scientific training which, while impeccable on scientific grounds, uncomfortably leaves a large chunk of the reality of every patient's psychic life completely untouched by any sort of medical thinking. As a result doctors tend to be extremely embarrassed about talking about their patients' religious beliefs and try to avoid it as it brings up uneasing feelings in them of the remnants of their childhood faith which often shot through with overly simple-minded views about God, hypocritical memories of religious cant and so on. However, with the alcoholic it is very necessary that he actively decides to turn his will and his life over to some power other than himself.

#### **Step 4 – Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**

Here of course the benefits are fairly obvious:

- a) the necessity for complete honesty, frequently a dazzling new experience for the alcoholic, and, and
- b) their ability to face up to the reality of who they are, rather than who they fantasise themselves to be.

#### **Step 5 – Admitted to God, ourselves and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.**

Here the mechanisms are:

- a) that, in some way, saying out aloud one's faults makes them very much more real, a real fact of life, rather than an idea in the mind. This is very therapeutic.
- b) This is the start of Erikson's Basic Trust on which he lays so much emphasis and is, of course, the rock bottom foundation for any mental health.

One of the significant things about alcoholics is that they have never had, or have lost, this basic trust in themselves and other people. Here, they are forced to trust another human being, maybe for the first time for many years. They have to make themselves vulnerable to another human being, something of which they have been absolutely terrified and they have put on the front of invulnerability, even God-like invulnerability.

- c) Here they are likely to be astonished that they find at least one person seems to like them despite their exposure of their vulnerability and who doesn't kick them when they are down, and indeed seems to like them even though they have exposed themselves so frighteningly.
- d) The necessity for the humility of being seen as an imperfect person instead of the mask of perfection that the alcoholics always presented to others and uneasily to themselves, while at the same time hating who they were and loving the unreal ideal of themselves that was, in fact, non-existent and must now be dropped, i.e., this is the start of self-love and acceptance which is the basis of health, St Francis' Brother Ass.

#### **Step 6 – Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.**

Here they must be prepared to change and let the healthy forces in their psyche well up to give them new options and in the case of the alcoholic almost any change will be for the better as all the mechanisms of their emotional life have been very sick indeed. However, it is the ability to be

open-minded and be ready for other ideas to well up which is important. There must be, and often it comes with this Step, a willingness to believe that he doesn't have all the answers as in the past he had thought he had to have, and again that he needs to depend on something other than himself.

**Step 7 – Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.**

Here we have a positive request to follow up Step 6. A healthy exercise opposed to the alcoholic mechanism of “promises, promises, but no decisions” and as such commits them to a positive, and what is most important, a different course of action as far as our emotional life is concerned.

**Step 8 – Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.**

Here, of course, the obvious advantages of a complete house cleaning, going into all the nooks and crannies, to clean out those devils which lurk in the crevices of their minds and creep up on them when their guard is dropped to make them squirm in the middle of the night. Here is a way they can banish these demons forever.

**Step 9 – Made direct amends to such people wherever possible except when to do so would injure them or others.**

Here again is the healthy and humbling exercise aimed at destroying the narcissistic grandiose perfectionist sick way of thinking. They have to admit their faults publicly to another and not to be “number one” here, in direct opposition to their past series of half-baked apologies, excuses, lies and paranoid blaming of their faults on others in order to avoid the consequences of their actions. Here is a full and complete acceptance of responsibility for their actions without self-pity or excuses or trying to cop-out.

**Step 10 – Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.**

Here the repeated taking of the inventory is the necessary healthy psychological mechanism.

**Step 11 – Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.**

Here we have a nutritious fantasy system instead of the sick and destructive old phantasies of revenge, jealousy, grandiosity, self-pity and so on. Here they are allowing themselves to be open to “the god”, i.e., to any healthy and nourishing movements of the psyche.

**Step 12 – Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.**

This perhaps is the most important in my mind for the continual rehabilitation of an alcoholic. Here we have personified all the virtues which the alcoholic must identify with if he is to stay sober – here he must be the giver not the taker and he must be giving of himself and of his time. He must humble himself to repeat how he was led to Alcoholics Anonymous, reviving all of the old harsh memories of his drinking days and reminding him of the completely different lifestyle which he is living now. It continues to identify him with the solution, not the problem, to identify with the winners, not the losers. And it fulfils the old Biblical promise – it is in giving that you shall receive.

So there we have what I think is the best ready-made kit for emotional and spiritual change and growth that I know of. The Foundation for Mental Health in New Zealand will probably be aiming heavily at educating the public in sort of 'first aid kits for mental health' and I can really think of nothing better than the 12 Steps in some form or other. Certainly I know of no alcoholic who has continued to have a stable and happy recovery who has not, in one way or another, applied all of these psychological principles to himself. It has had profound effects on my own psychiatric thinking in that it has made me change my mind completely about the whole category of character disorders, personality disorders and especially about the rag-bag we call the "psychopath". I now believe that most of the stuff written in the textbooks about this is a load of rubbish and I see it now more as a reaction to a person's alcoholism than a cause and therefore curable by removing the cause. Certainly it is a way of involving every aspect of a sick person's psyche. Here the religious aspect is firmly grasped and the psychological mechanisms are remarkably sound.

As a result it is for, I think, any doctor, a humbling and ennobling experience to be honoured to stand by and watch, sometimes awestruck, that heroic and ever fascinating miracle embodied in these most famous medical quotations, "I treated them, God cured them."

We do not really have enough time to deal with the organisational structure of Alcoholics Anonymous and this really should form the basis of another paper in itself. The highly advanced technique of man-management embodied in their organisational structure which is a potent amalgam of theocracy, dictatorship, democracy and anarchy in which each alcoholic feels a real part of the organisation has, to me, astonishing similarities to what I am sure the theologians of the Christian Church were fumbling

towards when they spoke about people being “part of the body of Christ”. I feel that AA has succeeded where the Christian Church has, by and large, failed.

Again, the techniques of the AA meeting deserves a paper in itself with the very powerful therapeutic, or perhaps maintenance, affect of:

- a) peer approval
- b) group pressure
- c) public confession
- d) submission to the group conscience

All these are, of course, very powerful forces, perhaps the most potent forces known to man to maintain political cohesiveness and we see remarkable similarities in the political and social organisation of the great People’s Republic of China.

Surely it is a very remarkable organisation and indeed it is unique with many lessons to teach us in the widest spheres of politics, education and organisation in our cruel and chaotic people-eating society.

I hope we learn these lessons before it is too late.

Paper presented to:

The 1977 Summer School of Alcohol Studies – Massey University  
3 February 1977

Organised by:

The National Society on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence NZ Inc

Reprinted with Permission

## Chapter 9

# Al-Anon Family Groups in New Zealand

Al-Anon in New Zealand came into being in the same way and for the same reasons as it did in America.

In the beginning wives went along to AA meetings with their husbands. These were usually held in private homes and whilst the AAs were having their meeting in a separate room, the wives met together, no doubt in the kitchen preparing supper, and very likely discussing their difficulties. It was quite an event for these women, who had avoided meeting people for so long and who had never been able to talk about alcohol and its resulting problems. Here were people with the same problems, who understood the frustration and loneliness. In spite of the fact that their partners had found sobriety in AA, difficult situation still existed in the home and with the family. They began to see that they needed a deeper understanding of alcoholism, what it had done to their partners and, what is more, what it had done to them and their families, the non-alcoholics. They wondered if they too could find some help with the programme which had helped their husbands to achieve sobriety. The results of working together in groups had proved helpful to the AA's and so the wives started to have their own groups. The wife's groups proved to be most beneficial. Without knowing it, they were laying the foundations of Al-Anon Family Groups. The first N.Z. 'Wive's Group' started in Dunedin in 1948 in a private home; other groups started up and, in 1954, these became Al-Anon Family Groups.

In 1955, Heather wrote to Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters Inc. in New York and purchased their newly published book, 'Al-Anon Family Groups' and also some pamphlets and booklets. At that time it was not possible to import literature into New Zealand without a license and it was extremely difficult to get one, so Heather asked for, and obtained, permission to reprint any of the literature she already had. Al-Anon H.Q. N.Y. also, very generously, sent every new Al-Anon Group starting in New Zealand a complementary copy of their book and also an assortment of pamphlets, enough to get a new group off the ground. Heather, with the generous help of Don M. (AA) of Palmerston North had the book *Al-Anon*

*Family Groups* reprinted, omitting only the personal stories and put into paperback form, and sold it for 2/-. Copies were also made from the other literature and pamphlets were sold for 3d and 6d which was certainly within the reach of most budgets. How did Al-Anon manage to finance this? Heather used to say, "God is our Banker", and indeed he was. A friend gave Heather a sum of money which was held in credit for Al-Anon in New York, so when a license was finally obtained, with the invaluable help of Snow (AA, Al-Anon could order literature and pay later. If the finance permit was withdrawn, Al-Anon would still be able to obtain literature. Al-Anon desperately needed these guidelines as new groups were starting up all over the country.

In their travels all round New Zealand, Ian and Heather met many wives, husbands and relatives of alcoholics. Heather kept up a regular correspondence with them, thus keeping the fellowship together. Alcoholics are notorious for the so called 'geographical cure' and naturally families moved to all parts of New Zealand. This was a devastating experience for some of the wives, many of whom were living in very isolated districts, often miles from their nearest neighbour. Heather corresponded regularly with them all and was often able to put them in touch with others in similar situations. This correspondence was a lifesaver, but it grew to such proportions that Heather decided to send out a regular newsletter,

These were the 'Loners' and Heather suggested that it might help them to feel a real part of the fellowship if there was a 'loners' project, such as the Al-Anon Annual Magazine. This challenge was taken up and the first editor lived on a fairly isolated farm in Hunterville.









