

# Alcoholics Anonymous New Zealand Archives

New Zealand General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous



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## Oral History Project Process

### Before You Begin

Contact the interviewee to ask their verbal permission to conduct the interview. Make a clear presentation of the purpose and nature of the interview. Inform the interviewee of the time investment involved, of the general areas to be covered, how the interview will be conducted and what will be done with the recording/transcript, how it will be used and for what purposes.

### Pre-Interview Preparation

The interviewer should have a good understanding of how A.A. operates and ideally would do some research in advance on the interviewee.

Send the interviewee a list of your questions a week in advance and advise the interviewee that the list is a guideline and that spontaneous questions may arise during the process.

Send the interviewee the biographical information form for them to fill out and send back to you. Let them know that the biographical information will be given to Archives along with the copy of the recording.

Send the Oral History Release Form in advance for the interviewee to fill out and sign. You can either collect this in person or it can be scanned and sent back via email. This needs to be completed before the interview is conducted.

Organise the time and location of the interview. Preferably somewhere the interviewee is comfortable and with little background noise or interruptions.

### The Equipment

If the interview is in person, then a digital recorder with attachable microphones is preferable but a cell phone with a voice recorder can also be used.

Test out the device you are going to use in advance of the interview to ensure you know how to work it and it is recording accurately

- Ensure you have enough space to record at least 90 minutes of an interview and that the device is fully charged, or you have spare batteries
- If you are using your cell phone for the interview, ensure that your phone is switched to flight mode so that you will not be interrupted by any phone calls or notifications
- If the interview is performed over Zoom, then please adjust your settings before beginning your questions.
  - Settings -> Recording -> Select 'Optimise for 3rd party video editor'. Select 'Record during screen sharing'.
  - Settings -> Video -> Select 'HD'

## **The Interview**

- Try to make the interviewee comfortable by chatting before the interview
- At the beginning of your recording (both zoom or audio recording) state your name, the date, your location, and the name of the person you are interviewing along with the reason for the recording and ask permission to conduct the interview. E.g., My name is John Smith, and I am interviewing Jane Doe on 29 October 2021 in Jane's home in Auckland. I am recording Jane today for an oral history project so that her story of sobriety can be donated to the Alcoholics Anonymous New Zealand Archives for posterity. Jane, do I have your permission to record you and donate the audio file to the Alcoholics Anonymous New Zealand Archives?
- Begin the interview by asking biographical questions to ease the interviewee into the process. You can use the form they have completed to guide this.
- Ask open-ended questions that will ensure the interviewee is not answering with yes or no
- Don't ask leading questions or show any judgment to any of the interviewee's answers
- After you ask a question, wait for a response even if you must sit in silence
- Do not cut off or talk over the interviewee
- If there are comments or abbreviations that are used that are known to both of you, ensure that it is explained in the recording. Not everyone will understand, especially in future years
- If someone is not comfortable with answering a question then move on, cooperation and compromise are key
- Show interest in the stories and take active part in the conversation without dominating
- Ask spontaneous questions where appropriate, this will ensure you get information that you may not have thought of

- Try to cover topics that cover the entire person's life, not just the early stages of sobriety
- Use props such as photo albums or letters, if possible, to stimulate memories
- Ensure that the interview works for the interviewee, make it a convenient time, and stop the interview if the person asks or is tired. You can always complete a second interview
- Pause the recording if you are interrupted, or the interviewee needs a break. Be careful to ensure the recording has started again after the break.
- Label all the audio files with the name of the person, the date and the location and who interviewed them.
- If possible, write up a summary of the interview and the key topics that were covered. This will assist the Archives with cataloguing the recording without listening to the entire interview.

### **Post Interview**

- Follow up with a thank you email or phone call to the interviewee to ensure that they are happy with the process
- Contact the Archivist at [archives@aa.org.nz](mailto:archives@aa.org.nz) to organise transfer of the audio file and accompanied documents

### **Ethical and Legal Considerations**

By signing the Oral History Release Form the interviewee agrees to transfer to the Alcoholics Anonymous New Zealand Archives title all literary rights, including copyright. They agree that the interview may be made available for research and such public programming as the Alcoholics Anonymous New Zealand Archives may determine. This includes right and license to reproduce, copy, modify, display, distribute, perform, broadcast, transmit, and create derivatives from the recording. This may include use of the interview material in print and in live or recorded programs for radio, television, or any electronic publishing medium.

The interviewee transfers all the above rights without limitation, to support the mission of AA and to disseminate information about AA, upon the condition that they and any other A.A. member they identify, remain anonymous at the level of the public media.

### **Sample Questions for Interview**

#### **Before A.A.**

Please tell me a little about your life before you found A.A.

When and where were you born?

What kind of childhood did you have?

As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

How did you start drinking?

When and how did your drinking get out of control?

When did you know you had hit bottom?

## **Recovery**

When did you first hear of AA, and from what source?

How and when did you get started in A.A.?

When and where did you sober up?

Where did you go to your first meeting? What other meetings have you attended?  
(Include names and addresses if known)

What did you think of it?

Can you tell me about your early sobriety, your steps work, and problems you had in those first days of learning the A.A. way?

What was AA's "reputation" in the community?

How was it different from what you encountered through your initial introduction?

What was your perception of AA's success in the general population when you were first introduced to us?

How has that perception changed over time?

Did you have a sponsor when you first came in? What type of sponsorship did you have?

How many groups or meetings were in existence?

Can you recall the formats used at some of these early meetings?

How were they run?

When was A.A. started in your town or area?

How often were meetings held?

Who were some of the people playing important roles in the formation of new groups?

What else do you know about the growth of A.A. during that period?

Which individuals were especially prominent in your sobriety?

How were new members contacted?

What kinds of Twelfth Step work were going on?

Are there any Twelfth Step anecdotes that stick out in your mind you'd care to share?

Would you tell me about your experiences sponsoring others?

## **Unity – Group issues and community perception of A.A.**

Today, Conference-Approved literature is available to help A.A. members deal with a wide variety of challenging questions. Back in the day, all you had was the book

Alcoholics Anonymous, common sense and your compassion. What did you think of the Big Book, and how often did you use it?

How did early A.A.s treat newcomers?

How did your group(s) treat constant slippers?

Thirteenth steppers?

How were people wishing to talk about multiple addictions during your meetings addressed?

How about non-alcoholic drug addicts walking in off the street for their first meeting?

We say sometimes that all that's needed to form an A.A. meeting is two drunks, a resentment, and a coffeepot. Can you talk at all about the differences that led to new groups being formed in your area?

In A.A. Comes of Age Bill W. writes about numerous issues over which anger and contention arose and threatened the undoing of our Fellowship. The groups nationwide, for example, did not immediately accept spiritual principles we know today as the Twelve Traditions. What controversies over issues addressed in the Traditions can you recall people wrestling with?

How were meeting spaces acquired?

Was rent or other funding obtained by gambling sessions? Bingo games?

How did the membership resolve these affairs?

Today, A.A. is well known to, and supported by, police officers, judges, and corrections officials. What kind of relationship did A.A. in your area have with local authorities?

How has that changed since you sobered up?

Treatment facilities in this millennium frequently host A.A. and other Twelve Step meetings. Did treatment centres exist in your area when you sobered up?

Did any of them use a Twelve Step format or incorporate meetings into their structure?

Did you seek the cooperation of other local community or professional agencies?

Today, radio and television public service announcements for A.A. as well as web sites are becoming commonplace. When you first got sober, how did A.A.s interact with the media?

Have you had any profound experiences sharing your relationship with alcohol with the public? What cautions might you have for young A.A.s today regarding media exposure?

During the early years of your recovery, how did the community receive Alcoholics Anonymous?

Do you think your group(s) has had an influence in your community? If so, how?

## **Service**

How and why did you get into service work?

What contributions did you, yourself, make to the growth of the Fellowship?

What do you remember of early conferences, assemblies, and conventions?

Can you recall opening Intergroup or central offices?

Who made the initial outreach to you, in what manner, and in what year?

What was involved in your application process?

What were your first impressions of the active AA legacies of Recovery, Service, and Unity?

What was your first impression of AA servants, GSO staff, Delegates? Describe your first encounters.

What were your impressions of your first General Service Conference? What year?

Describe some of the major decisions and Advisory Actions that involved your direct participation, and your committee activities over your years of service.

In your memory, what particular Conference agenda items developed into Advisory Actions?

Were there any that failed to gain Conference approval?

Is there anything you regret?

Any mistakes you believe you made?

Any plans that failed that you wish had been successful? What special occasions do you recall during your time of AA service?

How has AA changed (if it has) since you first found it?

Do you see any changes in the AA fellowship and its service processes, since your start of service?

Are there any strong similarities in the AA fellowship and its history of service, from your own service time through today?

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## Oral History Release Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_ hereby give this interview recorded on [date] \_\_\_\_\_ to the Alcoholics Anonymous New Zealand Archives as a donation. I hereby consent to my interview being recorded and hereby transfer all rights, title, and interest in the outcome of my interview to the GSBI understand the interview may be made available for research and such public programming as the Alcoholics Anonymous New Zealand Archives may, in its sole discretion, determine. This includes right and license to reproduce, copy, modify, display, distribute, perform, broadcast, transmit and create derivatives from the recording. This may include use of the interview material in print and in live or recorded programs for radio, television, or any electronic publishing media. I transfer all the above rights without limitation, to support the mission of A.A. and to disseminate information about A.A., upon the condition that I, and any other A.A. member I identify, remain anonymous in any public media.

This gift does not preclude any use that I may wish to make of the information in the recording.

Name of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments (if any): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## AANZ Archives Oral History Biographical Sketch

This form is intended to provide the interviewer background information to assist with the interview. Please fill out as many sections as you prefer.

Subject's Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No. \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

### Family History

Birth Date & Place of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Father's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Father's Occupations \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's Occupations \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date and Place of Marriage \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's Occupations \_\_\_\_\_

Children's Names \_\_\_\_\_

### Education, Career, and Activities

Primary Education (School & Location) \_\_\_\_\_

Dates \_\_\_\_\_

Secondary Education (School & Location) \_\_\_\_\_

Dates \_\_\_\_\_

Higher Education (School & Location) \_\_\_\_\_

Dates \_\_\_\_\_

Professions (Jobs), Locations, Dates \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



A.A. Service History \_\_\_\_\_

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**If Applicable:**

Military Service (Branch, Rank, Dates) \_\_\_\_\_

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Civic and Community Activities (Organisation/Activity, Offices Held) \_\_\_\_\_

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Other Pertinent Information \_\_\_\_\_

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Prepared By \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_