

NA history

The twentieth anniversary dinner celebration — 18 August 1973

As part of our series celebrating the fortieth anniversary of Narcotics Anonymous, we are featuring a talk given by Jimmy K at NA's twentieth anniversary celebration. Because of its length, we've separated this talk into two parts. Part Two will be printed next month. The following is the first part of a transcript of the tape recording made at that celebration. As such, both Bob B's introductory remarks and Jimmy K's talk contain incomplete sentences. Due to the historical significance of this talk, we didn't feel as though we could make any edits whatsoever, even to fill in missing words. We have used punctuation to make this transcript as reader-friendly as possible. Otherwise, it is printed verbatim.

Bob B: The twentieth anniversary is, I think, a good occasion for me in terms of I was not around for the twenty years because I was still playing crazy. But about fifteen years ago, when I did come around, I met some people that . . . something happened in the process. And it wasn't to happen for another three years, before I was to get clean at the insistence of the state. And then to find out that I could come out after a couple of years and to stay clean over a period of over ten years . . . It wouldn't have been possible if there wasn't people like the people in this room that kind of insisted, kind of pushed, kind of bad-rapped me, that kind of held me up. They gave me all the things that were necessary, the things that I needed.

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And, at the same time, one person that I became very close to, at that time, stayed in close touch with me over the years, giving me some confidence that I could do it if I would only try. And we've been through many trials of error in my growing up. And, at the same time, we've shared a lot of heartaches and pleasures, also. I'm going to let him tell you his own story in terms of what happened . . .

At this time, I've been going through papers. Our offices and things have been in trunks of cars and backs of garages, in cardboard boxes, in old filing cases, and what have you. And many of these things that we keep as mementos as to times gone by. And one of these mementos that I've kept over a period of years is an original set of bylaws that were adopted in 1953 on August the 17th, which was yesterday, today is like a year (twenty years) and one day. This set of guides were set down in order to determine, to run, or to govern NA as a whole. Some particular guides . . . There have been many, many additions and changes since then. But at this time I thought it would be appropriate that I put these here bylaws in some kind of archives for safekeeping. And who better is there to give this and put it in safekeeping but the person who helped put it together, kind of shepherded it around, kept us all tied in some manner together? And I put them in a binder so that he can probably put them away with the rest of his treasures as a remembrance of, say, oh, that's where it started and this is how it is today. And I would like to, at this time, to introduce and present this here set of bylaws as a token of safekeeping and a token of whatever. I

can't . . . don't even know the words to express it to Jimmy K, one of the founders of NA, and one of the people who has been a mainstay, and one that keeps it together and has kept it together through many of the years that it has been around. So, this is the bylaws, an original set, and I'm going to give these here to Jimmy. And at this time Jimmy probably can give a little more background and highlight as to where it came from, what happened, and what's happening right now. I'm gonna turn it over to Jimmy K.

Jimmy K: My name's Jimmy Kinnon. I'm an addict and an alcoholic. I've been on the verge of tears for about one hour here and that almost did it. But I'm not ashamed of tears anymore, providing they're that kind that are shed for something that's worthwhile. That just about wiped my brain clean. I can't even remember what I was going to say now. However, in our fellowship, at any time, our main purpose has to be always foremost in our lives, whether we're socializing with each other in our individual homes or whether we're at a gathering of this kind, particularly this kind. What I have to remember, personally, is that I'm here and possibly all of you are here because of people who'll never be here. The newcomer is the lifeblood of this organization; always has been, always will be.

Bob pointed out a few people who are here tonight and some people who couldn't make it tonight. Those people we call "trusted servants" of Narcotics Anonymous. Mostly, anyone who takes a position or any kind of leader—whether it's chairman of a group representative of a group, GSO representa-

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tive, trustee, or anything else regarding this organization—just lets himself in for a lot of work, a lot of criticism, and a lot of those things that go on. But you see, we have to grow, and our shoulders get broad enough to carry these things because the life that is given to us makes everything worthwhile. If it wasn't meaningful and worthwhile, I wouldn't be here tonight. If this program didn't lift me higher, carry me further, and make me feel better than anything else I ever did in my life, I wouldn't be here. That's for damn sure!

are a few pictures over there on that case. These are some of the pictures of the beginnings. We started long before NA was a reality, even in name. We grew out of a need and we found . . . Those of us who were members had come into AA and found we could recover. In AA we found out that many addicts were still going down the road of degradation and death. And we thought it was right that we should try to do something, but you know, we're funny people, the more we try to do things together, the more we fight each other and the more we tear each other

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I sit up here in this chair. I've always admired these chairs but never thought I'd sit in one. I say, "Ye Gods! Shades of Peter Lorrie, you know, where's the fat man?" But first things first they tell us. You know, this is part of a dream come true and a dream envisions great changes but progress demands many small actions. A dream doesn't come true because of one group of people, or one man, or two men, or three men. It comes true because a lot of people work at it, because a lot of people put effort into it, because a lot of people buy the idea and carry it forward. That's one of the reasons we're here.

Most of you have noticed that there

apart, tear down the very thing we try to build. And that's been the history, up until a few short years ago, of Narcotics Anonymous. We tore down as fast as we built. That's the kind of people we are, and we must recognize that to recover all of us must know the nature of the illness, the nature of the addict, and the nature of recovery. All these things are necessary to grow, and to live, and to change. And we started from resentments. Resentments made us grow.

Before NA there was HFD, Habit Forming Drug groups. These were hidden. These were one or two or three people meeting in apartments, here and there. Nobody knew where they

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were. They demanded certain things and were dominated by one or two persons. You know, you and I don't go for authority. We don't like authority. A few of the people I met down on the Skid Row years ago from East LA formed another group known as Addicts Anonymous. They infringed on the AA name and they died very quickly because they too were dominated by one man. We had another group started in the [San Fernando] Valley then that also called itself HFD and was dominated by one man. So, we found out very early, and our experience has taught us, that we can have no bosses, no big shots in Narcotics Anonymous.

For a while after we formed a lot of things happened that I'm not going into tonight, but due to some things that happened and due to the nature of the addict, the nature of our illness, some people were put in a position where they became the leaders again, the Great White Father. You know, we can't have a Great White Father or a Big Momma. You know, it doesn't work in this organization. And NA died once more, and the friends of ours in AA helped to pick us up, and said, "Don't let it bother you." These were the real friends we had in the beginning; members of AA who believed in us, members of AA who themselves had a dual problem at that time and recognized that; they came and helped us get started again. But again and again this happened in this organization. One person would try to dominate the whole movement.

And every time it happened we began to die. Because the traditions go down the drain when we try this. And one of the first things that we said when we met as a group in that house—

Number One up there—where we formed those bylaws that Bob was talking about, where we sat together trying to iron out some of the things we wanted to do. We came down to very simple ideas: Number One, that we believed that this program of Twelve Steps would work for addicts as well as for alcoholics. Two, that the traditions must be followed if we were to grow, and grow as a fellowship that could stand on its own feet aside from and away from Alcoholics Anonymous. We could take our own place as a fellowship, and not be dominated by or affiliated with anything or anybody else. And we said we would keep a place open for at least two years and if, in two years, one or two showed that this program could work for them we would have felt that it had been worthwhile.

That, fundamentally, was what we started with. But we argued about it for about six weeks before we put those bylaws on paper, and then we didn't want the bylaws. The sooner I figured we could get rid of the bylaws, the better off we'd be. Because the policies of the traditions are enough to guide us in what we have to do. The traditions will save us from ourselves. And this is what is so necessary for a fellowship like ours. This is life, the other way is death as we know it. But how hard and how difficult it is not to go back. How difficult?

The first big order of business we had when we got together was the name. I was the first chairman of what we then called . . . ah . . . nothing. AANA, that's what it was called and I said, "You simply can't do that. You made me your chairman. We're gonna have to find another name. We can't call ourselves AANA or NAAA." And

the committee who voted me the chairman immediately vetoed what I said. Right, that's a good start. I wasn't going to get away with any horseshit from these people. They were going to find out what was right to do. And so the first order of business was to contact Alcoholics Anonymous to find out if we could use their name; and they found out that you couldn't do it. So I got the satisfaction, at least, of being right on the first thing that they vetoed. That made me feel a little better, you know, because—I got news for you—I get my own way most of the time. I know you recognize that because so do you. That's the kind of people we are.

But we had a lot of trouble when we first got together because I'm just like you are and you're just like I am. You're going to have to show me that what you say is going to work or I ain't going to go along. And thank God we are like that. I think that's what makes this program work eventually.

It was very hard to find a place to meet, after we got together and agreed what we were going to do. You couldn't find a hall to meet in. Nobody would allow us in. They didn't trust us in any way, shape, or form. And it's pretty sad when you go from one place to another after you've got something real good going and nobody will let you use their hall. You know! Eventually we did find a Salvation Army hall and they allowed us to use it for five dollars a month. You know, that's pretty good, but there were no facilities there. There was one little restroom with a hand basin and a bowl in there and that was it. There was no kitchen, so we had to go out and buy a little electric stove and some coffee pots, some cups, which I

still have at home. I found them just this week. I've had them all these years. We used to give them to each other because this week you might meet at my place—which is the second picture up there—and next week we might meet at your place. So you took the cups with you so everybody would have a cup to get their coffee in. You know, not many of us had more than a couple of cups in our houses then; in fact, not many of us were working. But that's the way it was. I still have those things.

On the table here is the copy that we drew up, or rather Doris drew up, and Guildia, for the newspaper as our announcement that we were now in business. You know, we now had a hall, we now had a set of bylaws, and we now had a purpose.

At this point, Jimmy read "Our Purpose" and the announcement for NA's first meeting. A reprint of both these items can be found in the August 1993 issue of The NA Way.

Next month we'll hear more about NA's beginnings, the first recovery meetings, and events leading up to 1973. The second part of Jimmy's talk describes how our early members grappled with issues such as informing law enforcement agencies about the new group and includes the story of what could be called NA's first public information work.