

RECOVERY & ME

One Plus One Equals Thousands

Anonymous

Recovery & Me is a monthly column that will appear the first Sunday of each month. This column will address issues that thousands of people in our area have faced or will face during the course of their recovery. I will try and blend what I have learned in the hope that this may in some way make a positive impact on your own personal recovery.

It was Friday morning June 10th, 2006. I was in Akron, Ohio with a group of some close friends celebrating Alcoholics Anonymous Founders' Day Weekend. We were discussing our plans for the day when one of our group suggested visiting the Gate Lodge on North Portage Path. To most people outside Alcoholics Anonymous the Gate Lodge on Portage Path has little significance. It does however, to those who have studied AA's history, hold extraordinary importance. This humble house is the former home of Henrietta Seiberling. It was at Henrietta's home in Akron, Ohio where Bill Wilson and Dr. Robert "Bob" Smith first met. When Dr. Bob was told by his wife Annie that there was a man from New York City who wanted to talk to another person about alcoholism, his initial reaction was to give Bill Wilson fifteen minutes of his time. What was intended to be a brief conversation turned out to be a six hour exchange of life experiences that started a life-long friendship. This meeting between these two gentlemen is often credited as the beginning of what is probably one of the greatest social movements in modern history; the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. Anyway, as I walked around the Gate Lodge property I noticed that there was a stage and chairs set up adjacent to the house. Up on the stage were two gentlemen rehearsing a scene from a play. Being curious, I meandered closer and sat in one of the chairs set up in front of the stage. It didn't take but a few seconds to discover what was happening. The two performers were rehearsing a scene from the production of "**Bill W. and Dr. Bob**". As I watched the fifteen minute segment of this play I was impressed by both the acting as well as the content of the story. I had an opportunity to speak with both the actors and the director and I discovered that the play would be opening Off-Broadway in New York City in February, 2007. The thought occurred to me that this would be a wonderful learning experience for anyone; even those not personally affected by alcoholism. So I contacted the theater and purchased a block of tickets, chartered a bus, printed out flyers and on Saturday, April 14, 2007, I along with 50 other individuals boarded a bus in Berks County and off to New York City we went.

The play began at two o'clock to a relatively full-house. As the lights came-up on the stage the two principals appeared. The actor who was portraying Bill Wilson introduced himself first to the audience.

"Hello, my name is Bill Wilson and I'm an alcoholic."

Like on cue the audience responded;

"Hi Bill."

As he heard the response to his introduction, laughter erupted and a small, not-so-well concealed smile appeared on the face of the actor.

As I sat in the theater and observed the reaction of the actor I was reminded of how many times I have experienced people responding to my name in similar fashion. I, along with tens of thousands of others, have discovered in this simple response there is an overwhelming sense of security, belonging, acceptance and comfort. So much of this play's dialog touched and moved me deeply that it is truly difficult to emphasize any one thing as being more important than another. However there was one scene in the play where the actor portraying Dr. Bob spoke with great passion and empathy about the sense of disconnect and self-hatred that his alcoholism had brought him to. He spoke of how desperately he wanted to stop the pain and torture that his alcoholic life had become. He talked about how he knew what he was doing was wrong; how he was hurting himself, his family, how he wanted nothing more than anything in life than to not have to drink, and the desperation of not knowing how to stop. As I watched the performer I began reflecting upon my own experiences when I was an active alcoholic. I was taken back to a time in my own life when my own sense of isolation, even when in the company of loved ones, was overwhelming. The feeling of complete and utter inability to feel any connection with another human being, the total absence of empathy, and a sense of depression and self-pity brought about by my alcohol addiction is a place I never want to visit again. Ironically, at the same time I pray that I will never forget it. In retrospect I am amazed how dark things were before the dawn.

As the play emphasized, Bill Wilson knew that if he wanted to keep his sobriety he had to carry this message of hope to another alcoholic and give it away. Bill met with Dr. Bob and did just that. Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob lit a fire that spread throughout the world. What happened in Akron, Ohio in May 1935, and the dramatization that occurred on a stage in New York City in April 2007, reminded me that it's every AA members' responsibility to carry the life-saving message of recovery to anyone, anytime, anywhere.

After the play concluded about twenty of us sat in the outdoor café area adjacent to the theater. The energy level and excitement of what we had all just witnessed was electric. For the next two hours those of us sitting together drank coffee and shared our reflections and feelings about the play. We talked about what our lives were once like and how the program of Alcoholics Anonymous had transformed us. We laughed at stories that would shock most outside of the program of AA. We spoke of the miraculous healing power of one alcoholic sharing their experience, strength and hope with another alcoholic. We talked openly about our past troubles and counted our blessings. We discussed how two strangers, who under ordinary circumstances would have never met, changed the lives of countless thousands by lighting a fire that continues after 72 years to burn brighter and hotter than ever.

A Dose of Humor:

A doctor wanted to teach a group of alcoholics about the physical hazards of liquor, so he produced an experiment that involved a glass of water, a glass of whiskey, and two worms. "Now, ladies and gentlemen observe closely the worms," said the doctor first putting a worm into the water. The worm in the water writhed about, happy as a worm in water could be. The second worm, he put into the whiskey. It writhed painfully, and it quickly sank to the bottom, dead as a doornail. "Now, what lesson can we derive from this experiment?" the doctor asked.

A gentleman sitting in the front of the classroom raised his hand and wisely responded, "Drink whiskey and you won't get worms!"

I welcome your questions, your ideas for recovery topics or perhaps a personal story or two. Don't forget, a dose of good humor about recovery or addiction is always welcomed...it has certainly helped me and many others through some tough times! Please send your submissions to: Council on Chemical Abuse, Attn: Recovery & Me, 601 Penn St., Ste. 600, Reading, PA 19601. You may choose to remain anonymous by including only your first name with your submission, as it may in part be reprinted in a future article.