

## THE BEGINNINGS — THE 'FORTIES

### The First Appearance

The earliest known appearance of Alcoholics Anonymous in the Harbor Area was when Hugh Van Aiken (deceased) made a Twelfth Step Call on Daniel "Curley" O'Neil (also deceased). This was on February 4, 1941. They talked and "Curley" began his early sobriety. Soon others in the Long Beach area who had similar problems began meeting at "Curley's" home. For some time they met in each others homes and attended A.A. meetings at the Cecil Hotel in Los Angeles.

The leaders of the Los Angeles group Frank Randell and Mort J., suggested that these pioneers of A.A. in the Harbor Area start a meeting of their own in Long Beach. The earliest known "official" meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous in Long Beach was on Wednesday April 2, 1941. It was initially called "The Long Beach Group" and they met at the Lagoon Clubhouse for about four months, and then moved to Townsend Hall on Pine Avenue and in 1943 moved to the Bowling Green Clubhouse.

### Early Press coverage

#### Progress Reported by Local Chapter of "A.A."

Continued growth of the Long Beach "chapter" of Alcoholics Anonymous and "excellent results" among its membership were reported yesterday by a prominent citizen who had been permitted to sit in as a spectator at one of the Monday night meetings of the organization. Alcoholics who have attained the "ex" stage or are striving seriously to do so are welcomed into membership and the meetings may be attended by members of their families also.

About 25 Long Beach men and women are now enrolled as members off the local "chapter." No social, financial, religious nor political lines are drawn; there are no membership dues or other charges; names of members are not revealed —unless by themselves individually, and the only announced method of establishing contact with the organization is by addressing a letter to "Alcoholics Anonymous," P.O. Box 751, Long Beach.

Anyone desiring to suggest the name of someone who might be interested in receiving help through the organization may submit the name in a letter so addressed. Sources of such names, it is emphasized, are never revealed.

The Alcoholic Foundation of New York is the national headquarters of the ex-alcoholics fellowship. Inquiries to the headquarters may be addressed to

P.O. Box 658 Church Street Annex, New York, N.Y. The nationwide membership of the organization totals 2,000 or more.

"We of A.A. believe that two-thirds of our number have already laid the foundation for permanent recovery," reads in part, a statement of the position and efforts of the growing group. "More than half of us have had no relapse at all, despite the fact we often had been pronounced incurable. This approach to the alcoholism problem is based squarely upon our own drinking experience, what we have learned from medicine and psychiatry, and upon certain spiritual principles common to all creeds. No member is obliged to conform to anything whatever except to admit that he has the alcoholic illness and that he honestly wishes to be rid of it. We have found that genuine tolerance of others, coupled with a friendly desire to be of service, is most essential to our own recovery".

There is no use of drugs in this program of regeneration of "all kinds of people," young and old, rich and poor, educated and otherwise, who have one thing in common, namely, they all had been "licked" by alcohol and now, because of something they have found, are or are becoming ex-alcoholics.

The above is from a local newspaper clipping, circa 1941.

## The First Office

A Central Office was first established in the Harbor Area on May 14, 1948. It was listed in the Long Beach Telephone Directory as:

Alcoholics Anonymous Harbor District  
1128 Dawson Ave. — Long Beach, California  
Telephone number 305-150 (later changed to 905-150)

Between 1943 and the date the Harbor Area Central Office was established, a number of groups had sprouted:

1. The Long Beach Group (April, 1941) (Later named The Mother Group)
2. The Bowling Green Group (March, 1945)
3. The San Pedro Group (May, 1947)
4. The Wilmington Group (May, 1947)
5. The North Long Beach Group (Jan., 1948)
6. The Downey Group (May, 1947)
7. The Signal Hill Group (1946)
8. The East Bay Group (July, 1947)
9. The 20 - 40 Group (for younger members) (May, 1947)
10. The Westside Group (date unknown)

It is interesting to note that the first known A.A. member in the Harbor Area to receive his First Year Pin was Hugh Van Aiken, in 1941. It was presented to him by his first sponsor, "Curley" O'Neil. The pin's shape was two hearts with the letter "A" in the center of each heart. In February 1942, Hugh gave "Curley" his first year pin. He was the first local A.A. member with one year of continuous sobriety, as a direct result of Hugh's first Twelfth Step Call in Long Beach. The ceremony took place in Townsend Hall on Pine Avenue.

On November 10, 1943, Bill Wilson and his wife Lois met with a group of over 400 sober men and women here in Long Beach who came to hear about the program of Alcoholics Anonymous and how the program works.

Rumor has it that this was when Lois W. and Flossie Lewis first discussed having a fellowship for those who were related to the alcoholics. Two names were tried; "Autonomous Auxiliary" and "Non-Alcoholics Anonymous". It would not be until 1951 that the organization was officially established and the name "Al-Anon" was finally decided upon.

Back to the Central Office.

In the early days the only contact with the A.A. Foundation that the Harbor Area Groups had was with the fledgling Los Angeles A.A. Office. As the story goes, Jack Jones got tired of running up to Los Angeles every time they needed something, so he got together with the group in Signal Hill and proposed that they start a Central Office in Long Beach for the mutual benefit of the groups in the Harbor Area.

They got in touch with Major Harry J. White - USAF retired, a representative of the Los Angeles Central Office and a member of the East Bay Group. Members of the first nine groups in the area (now including the Westside Group) met in his home in Naples to discuss and plan such a venture.



**1**

The outcome — they formed the Harbor Area Central Committee. The first Chairman of the Harbor Area Central (later called 'Service') Committee was Bill S., 1948 - 1949. The next step was to find an office and a secretary. Clarence J. Lewis and his wife Flossie (who was first exposed to A.A. January 1, 1945 at the Ebell Club) were asked and they accepted, and became the original "Special Workers" (from 1948 to 1955). The Harbor Area Central Service Office was started in the Lewis' home on May 14, 1948. The mailing address was P.O. Box 751, Long Beach, California.

Bert Kersey, Jack Jones and Jack C. were chosen to see about a telephone, which was installed in the Lewis' home (the Central Office) at 1128 Dawson Avenue, Long Beach. The telephone number was 305-150. Flossie took most of the calls and did the majority of the running of the office in the beginning. Advertisements were placed in the local newspaper, the Press Telegram.

Another interesting development in the early days in Southern California was when Sybil C. and her brother Tex started the Hole In The Ground Group.

They had both been attending the meetings in Los Angeles and Tex said, ". . . I'm sick of picking up guys in Long Beach and driving them thirty-five miles to Los Angeles. Well, the "boys" in L. A. were not happy about that and threatened to excommunicate Tex. He just laughed.

That was in 1941 and The Hole In The Ground Group has been meeting in Huntington Park ever since. Some time later the "boys" in Los Angeles asked Sybil to come up and be the executive secretary for the Central Office of Alcoholics Anonymous in Los Angeles. She did and she stayed there for twelve years. The first public meeting was held at 728 Elm Street, in the Long Beach Machinists building, the speaker was Myrtle S.



