

The Only Requirement

A Desire to Stop Drinking

By Rick R.

Years ago, at a meeting in my home group, at the time, about halfway through the meeting, a man called (let's say) Harry was sharing and he started going off on a religious tangent and went on and on with the "Praise God and the Halleluiahs", and before long I was squirming in my seat. I leaned over to my friend Jim and said, I'm about to get up and walk out of here. Eventually I did get up and leave. The next day I saw Jim again at the meeting and began to complain about how Harry ran on and on with the religious rant, and Jim turned to me and explained that several newer members came up to him after the meeting and said, "That was the best meeting that they had ever attended". In time, Harry settled in and became part of the regulars in that group.

I have become a lot more patient in my old age with people who share in a manner that I'm not comfortable with and I attribute that to my continuous attendance at Step Study meetings that give time to the Twelve Traditions as well as the Twelve Steps. I remember attending the Bill Wilson Memorial meeting at a convention in southern California 1971 shortly after Bill had passed away, and at that meeting, they had 10 well established members who had known Bill very closely and each one of them told, a five minute, or so, story of a personal experience that they had with Bill. The one that got my attention was a story about Bill, on a trip across the country, by train, was asked if he would stop in a small town in the country and speak at their meeting. When the train stopped, the crowd of A.A.'s at the station expected a large entourage of staff to arrive with Bill and were surprised when the door to the door opened and Bill stepped off the train alone all bundled up with one suitcase in his hand. He proceeded to the meeting hall and as the meeting got started, everyone rose from their seats and began to sing Religious Hymns, and that disturbed Bill. After he finished speaking to the group, they again, stood up and sang Hymns. Bill returned to the train and continued on his way to California, quite disturbed by what had happened. "Their trying to turn A. A. into a Religious movement" he exclaimed. As he continued along his way, he took an approximate head count of all the people who attended that meeting and compared that number to the population of that small town and concluded that that meeting was probably the largest meeting per capita in this country.

This story reminds me that my personal discomfort is not a good reason to prevent anyone from attending A.A. meetings if they have a desire to stop drinking. If I could make rules about what can and can't be said at a meeting, I might just think that I can enforce rules about profanity and other things that bother me. Tolerance and Trust that the program, as it is, is strong enough to weather the day-to-day individual missteps that we see happening all the time and if the group is strong on principles, it will be strong enough to survive. It seems that if a person is introduced to a strong and healthy environment, he/she usually adjusts to the protocol of that meeting, in time, gets stronger, and if they are introduced to a weaker environment, they seem to get weaker. It is up to me to be patient with everyone that comes with the desire to stop drinking and understand that most of the behaviors that we think are out of line, are but more symptoms of alcoholism, and they probably need us the most.