The Survival of Alcoholics Anonymous

We Chuckle at the Language

By Rick R.

In my home group our Thursday 7am. Meeting is a Big Book Study, and recently, the topic was Chapter 2 There is a solution. The program of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) came into existence in 1935 and the Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) came into existence in 1939 after the first 100 alcoholics were sober and it is an absolute miracle. There were two movements that tried to solve the alcoholism problem long before A.A. came along. (The Washingtonians drifted away from their initial purpose of helping the individual alcoholic, and disagreements, infighting, and controversies over prohibition eventually destroyed the group. The Oxford Groups failed because they were aggressively evangelical, and they set out to save the world.) It is plain to see the difference in the message of Alcoholics Anonymous and how well that small group of members had the wisdom to examine the mistakes made by those earlier groups and published the Big Book as it is today. When we read the Big Book and The Twelve Steps and The Twelve Traditions (12&12) we sometimes see some things that are offensive to people in our generation and we chuckle at the language of that era and we have the wisdom to not edit the first 164 pages and in the 12&12 Tradition Three, as they were trying to establish who they were going to allow into the program and who they were going to reject, someone suggested that "beggars, tramps, asylum inmates, prisoners, queers, plain crackpots, and fallen women were definitely out. Yes sir, we'd cater *only* to pure and respectable alcoholics!" LOL. Of course, as we know, sounder minds won that argument and if you read tradition one in the 12&12 it says, "Does this mean," some will anxiously ask, "that in A.A. the individual doesn't count for much? Is he to be dominated by his group and swallowed up in it? We may certainly answer this question with a loud "No!" We believe there isn't a fellowship on earth which lavishes more devoted care upon its individual members; surely there is none which more jealously guards the individual's right to think, talk, and act as he wishes. No A.A. can compel another to do anything; nobody can be punished or expelled. Our Twelve Steps to recovery are suggestions; the Twelve Traditions which guarantee A.A.'s unity contain not a single "Don't." They repeatedly say, "We ought…" but never "You must!"

When I entered the program many years ago, the elders of that group suggested that if I planned to go to so many A.A. meetings a week, that one of them should be a Step Study and I have been doing that ever since. I even added a Big Book Study meeting later-on. I have studied those two books inside and out and I understand the evolution of the social mentality and I appreciate it when current words are sometimes replaced to assure that no one is left out or discriminated against. My main concern is that somewhere along the line, someone will edit the Big Book and The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and if that should happen, I believe that the A.A. program would eventually become irrelevant and eventually go the way of the Washingtonians and the Oxford Groups programs. The A. A. Program has saved my life and the lives of millions of people who suffered from a terrible disease and is no threat to anyone. If there are any doubts about anything I have stated I might suggest reading these two books, cover to cover and you will understand.