

AA GROUP AUTONOMY

Let Them Sing

By Rick R.

Autonomy is simply a form of independence that gives each group the latitude to be creative in their own way, when it wants to appeal to certain factions of the Alcoholic community at large so long as it doesn't cross over into making those painful mistakes that could lead us down that path that led to the dismantling of those groups that came before AA. Today, in AA we have meetings that cater to specific segments of the AA population, such as: Men's Meetings, Women's Meetings, Closed Meetings, (alcoholics only), Open Meetings, Gay and Lesbian Meetings, Step Study, Big Book, Spanish Speaking, and so on. The common theme is to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Anyone who has a desire to stop drinking cannot be turned away if that meeting wants to be called an AA meeting. I was serving in the U.S. Navy at the time when I got sober in late 1969 and shortly after my one-year sober celebration, I was Shipped out to the Philippines to go aboard a fuel tanker, and I spent the next four months hauling fuel out to the Tonkin Gulf and refueling the convoys of ships out there during the Vietnam War. During that four-month period I was unable to go to a single AA meeting. This was never a problem for me as I have never wanted a drink from my first day in the program. What happened during that time when I was cut off from the daily news concerning the AA program, without my knowledge, was the sad news that Bill W. had passed away. This happened shortly after I left the country and by the time I returned home it was no longer the topic of conversation and I heard nothing about it. Shortly after I returned home, I attended a convention in California and the main event at that convention was the Bill W. Memorial Meeting. On the stage at that meeting there were ten chairs lined up and seated in those chairs were ten of the most prominent speakers of that time, and each of them were to tell a five-minute story of their own personal experience with Bill. The story that I still remember from that meeting goes something like this. On a request from some of his AA friends on the west coast, Bill was on a train going to California to speak at several well-planned meetings. The members of AA in a small Midwestern town heard that his train would be stopping there and asked if he would consider staying over for a day and speaking at their meeting. He agreed to do it as he usually did in those days. When the train arrived, the town members expected Bill to arrive with an entourage of people assisting him, and they had arranged a welcome with a band, a large crowd, and an all the town's dignitaries. When the train stopped, the only one that got off was Bill, as he walked down the ramp alone with one small suitcase. He proceeded to the planned meeting place and as the meeting began, Bill was somewhat shocked when the members started the meeting with several Church Hymns. Nevertheless, he fulfilled his promise and gave his talk and was again disturbed when the meeting ended with several more Hymns. After completing his stay, he boarded a train and continued on his way. On the train, what kept bothering Bill was "What are they doing to AA with the Church hymns" and it didn't seem right. Then Bill started thinking about the size and the population of that town, and about the large number of alcoholics that attended that meeting and he concluded that, per capita, that was probably the largest meeting in the country and if they wanted to sing hymns, well that's their business. I believe that tradition four leaves it up to the individual group's discretion to consider the different cultural influences that affect the makeup the spirit of our primary purpose, to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers and as Bil says. Let them Sing.