

# DID YOU KNOW.....

Extracts from ***Writing the Big Book*** by  
William H Schaberg published by CRP

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Pages 580, 584,585.

## **The book is delivered and distributed**

Every author distinctly remembers the first time they held a copy of their first book in their hands. It is memorable; it's exciting, seductive, and gratifying in the extreme. *Me... A published author!* Bill Wilson had just such a moment on the morning of Monday April 10 1939, as he unpacked the books from Cornwall Press. *Alcoholics Anonymous, The story of how one hundred men have recovered from Alcoholism* was no longer just a dream, or a text in need of constant revision and correction, or a project that might be completed sometime in the distant future. Instead, finally, right here and now, there was this tangible, almost vibrant thing, a real book that he could pick up, hold in his hands, leaf through and shamelessly admire while savouring some of the words *he* had written. It was indeed a big book, something with heft and substance, in a beautiful red cloth binding with the words "Alcoholics Anonymous" boldly embossed on the front cover in bright gold letters. At such a moment, how could he not have wondered once again "Good God... suppose this thing really does catch on? And if there are people who really want to stay sober!" It must have felt as if he was holding a miracle in his hands, a miracle that brought with it the promise of recovery for thousands

upon thousands of suffering alcoholics all over the country.

Ever mindful of his debt to Lois and of the many sacrifices she had made to bring him to this point, Bill carefully set aside the first book out of the box and saved it until December when he presented it to her as a special Christmas gift with this heartfelt inscription in the front fly leaf:

***“To Lois, one whose loving care and fortitude in our dark days together made these pages possible. So, to her, this first book of the first edition is lovingly and thankfully given. Bill. in memory of “The fifth Christmas” 12/25/39.”***

**The program of recovery is now available to all.**

By now it should be clear just how central and supremely important the date April 10 1939 is to the history of Alcoholics Anonymous. It can hardly be overstated. Before that day, it would have been impossible to describe “precisely” what all these men were doing to stay sober. While there was some modicum of consistency in Akron (largely because they were so deeply embedded in the Oxford Group), the

New Yorkers were far more free-wheeling, making generous allowances for Hank Parkhurst's broadly psychological approach and even tolerating an outspoken atheist within their midst. The difference between the two groups and the ways in which they formulated and practised their respective programs of recovery at this time was enormous. Bill Wilson admitted all this when he claimed that the publication of the book ended their "flying blind period" and allowed them to enter "a new phase". But this almost causal passing reference does not even begin to do justice to the reality of the situation – either before or after the book.

The book changed - **EVERYTHING**.

Suddenly there was a definite program of recovery to follow, one with twelve clearly articulated steps to be taken if you wanted to move from drunkenness to sobriety, along with three central chapters explaining in detail exactly what had to be done to put those twelve steps into practice. **None** of that had been offered to the world or clearly explained prior to April 10 1939.

...June 10 1935 is almost universally acknowledged as AAs "Founders Day" because it is the day on which Dr. Bob Smith is reputed to have finally stopped drinking. This was a significant milestone in the early evolution of

AA; especially because Wilson and Smith immediately began to approach other drunks, preaching a message of spiritual recovery—and doing so with some success. And the fact that both Bob and Bill stayed sober right up until the day of their deaths was essential to the credibility and the respectability of their program.

...“Flying blind” means just that; being unsure of exactly where you are, what you are doing, where you are going and how you are going to get there – but doing your best to figure it all out anyway.

But from the moment it was published, the Big Book ended all that confusion. It presented a definite, concrete, specific program that incorporated only the best of those disparate, sometimes confusing, and often experimental efforts. Suddenly the fellowship could declare with the utmost clarity and certainty:

If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it – then you are ready to take certain steps.

At some of these we balked. We thought we could find an easier softer way. But we could not. With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us

have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.

Remember that we deal with alcohol – cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help it is too much for us. But there is one who has all power – that one is God. May you find Him now!

Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon.

Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery.

That ringing declaration of hope was followed by the numbered Twelve Steps, along with forty-five pages of explicit instructions on how to make those steps a working part of your sobriety – and your life.

As such Monday April 10 1939 must surely be recognised as the Founding Day – the day on which the movement known as Alcoholics Anonymous *truly* Came into being.

# Alcoholics Anonymous

Printing