## History of the Chicago Group of Alcoholics Anonymous

Earl T. first heard of Alcoholics Anonymous in January of 1937 following several years of problem drinking, which had progressively worsened, to the point that his father suggested he contact the group in Akron, Ohio. Reportedly these men had similar drinking problems and had seemingly found a solution for their drinking bouts. Earl's reaction was it might be fine for them, but he could lick the problem his own way. This led Earl to the beer experiment, and by September of 1937 he decided if the gang in Akron had the answer he wanted it.

Upon arrival in Akron, Earl got in touch with one of the Akron group who he had known. Knowing that these men had felt the same as Earl, and had experienced the same problems and feelings, had a tendency to give him a certain amount of self-respect almost immediately. This was followed by a period of discussions with various members of the Akron group, who shared their experiences. Before leaving for home, Dr. Bob — Earl's sponsor — helped him work the steps as they were done at the time, and Earl returned to Chicago filled with hope and the strength of the group.

After a few months, Earl deliberately got drunk. One of the Akron group came and helped him sober up for the last time. Earl's only contacts with the AA's was frequent trips to Akron until August 1938, when Dick R., who after hearing of Earl's experience decided to go to Akron and spend some time with the group. For the next few months Earl and Dick spent a lot of time together. In the spring of 1939, Ken A. moved to Chicago. Ken had contacted the Akron group in the fall of 1938.

In the meantime, the three Chicago alcoholics continued to contact clergy, as well as medical people, offering to help anyone who might need help with their drinking problem.

In April 1939 the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, was published and in June the first national publicity was forthcoming in the form of a radio program. Gabriel Heatter's

We The People. As a result, Dr. Don Craske of Chicago Osteopathic Hospital asked Earl, Dick and Ken to talk to George M., and they persuaded him to go to Akron to spend some time with the group.

Again in August Dr. Craske asked them to talk to a woman alcoholic, Sadie I., who was taking the treatment at Osteopathic Hospital, who also went to Akron to spend time with the group. A few days later Dr. Seth Brown of Evanston contacted the group, as a result of a non-alcoholic member of the Cleveland group who was a nurse, and asked them to contact Sylvia K., who spent time with the Akron and Cleveland groups before returning to Chicago in September. On September 20, 1939, Chicago had what is known as the first group meeting. Held in Evanston in Earl's apartment, there were eight present: Earl, Dick R., Ken A., Sadie I., Sylvia K., George M., Earl's wife Katie, and a non-alcoholic, Grace Cultice, who was to become the group's secretary. About one week later Chicago got its first couple, Sam and Tee F., also referred by Dr. Brown.

On September 30, 1939 one of the very popular publications, *Liberty Magazine*, ran an article called "Alcoholics and God" which brought about 800 inquiries into the New York headquarters and several new members into the Chicago Group.

On October 21, 1939 a very significant event happened in Cleveland, which affected all of Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole. The *Plain Dealer*, Cleveland's leading newspaper, ran a series of seven articles on Alcoholics Anonymous. This resulted in hundreds of new members in the Cleveland group and proved that the program of Alcoholics Anonymous would work for the many who still suffered.

In November the Chicago group began holding meetings at the Medical and Dental Arts Building on North Wabash, between Lake and Wacker. The group began having dinner before their Tuesday night meeting. By the end of 1939, the small group had more than doubled. Sunday open houses were held in Sylvia's apartment. Also by this time the group had set up an office in Sylvia's apartment and Grace was acting as group secretary, typing the twelve step calls on 4" x 6" cards and keeping them on file.

In January of 1940, Bill Wilson made his first visit to the Chicago group. Held at Sylvia's apartment, thirty men and women attended the dinner and meeting. That same month the Illinois Medical Journal printed an article on Alcoholics Anonymous, which was followed by the Rockefeller Dinner coverage in February by *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines. Along with the twelve-step work by the members of the group, this brought in new members by the dozens. The Chicago group was handling twelve-step calls for Illinois, Wisconsin, Northern Indiana, Southwest Michigan and as far away as Minnesota.

One member who had been a sports writer on a Minneapolis newspaper and his sponsor, who had come into the program as a result of the *Liberty Magazine* story, and also a newspaper man, were making contacts in Minneapolis and in November carried the message to the first member in Minneapolis, Pat C., a very gregarious man who helped sober up hundreds in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa.

By December 1940, a committee had been formed and a Club Room was opened at 180 West Washington. Also in December the *Chicago Daily Times* ran an article on Chicago A.A., which brought in hundreds of inquirers and many new members. Back in January of 1940, Jim B., one of the early New York members, carried the A.A. message to Philadelphia. The first meeting there was at the home of George S., who had sobered up while reading the *Liberty Magazine* article. Philadelphia soon received help from three doctors, one of them Dr. Wiese Hammer, whose friendship with Mr. Curtis Bok, publisher of the *Saturday Evening Post* magazine, led to another milestone in A.A. Judge Bok sent one of his investigative reporters, Jack Alexander, to do a story on this new group, Alcoholics Anonymous.

Mr. Alexander was very skeptical. He thought this was some sort of a scam, but he visited the New York group, then went to Akron and Cleveland and interviewed many members and attended meetings in all three locations. He was still curious about the connections to the Rockefellers and the Oxford Group, so he next visited the Chicago group and met several members who were newspaper people, and he said these guys talked my language.

He then went to the group in St. Louis, where he had grown up, and met some people he had actually known who were now A. A. members. This convinced him; he wrote an excellent article, which was published March 1, 1941. This article opened the flood gates. Thousands of inquiries poured in and hundreds of books were sold. Thus the Chicago Group was very influential in getting this article published, certainly the most important publicity Alcoholics Anonymous has ever received.

May, 1941 found the relocation of the Club Room to 127 N. Dearborn financed by separate individual contributions. The first full time office was opened about October 1, 1941 with Grace Cultice named full time salaried secretary. The group paid for both Club and secretary. Members of sixty days or more were asked to sponsor a certain amount each month. No limit was placed on the amount of the pledge. In the beginning the total expenditures for the group for the month of October 1941 were \$341.05. There

were about 200 members in the Chicago Group at this time. Bill W. visited Chicago about this time, possibly to dedicate the opening of this office.

In April, 1941 the Chicago Group was divided into ten sectional groups because the Tuesday Night meeting had become very large, and Thursday night closed sectional meetings were held for members only. In June the Tuesday night meeting moved to the Central YMCA at 19 South LaSalle to accommodate the nearly 500 (including many wives) who were attending the meeting. Any business requiring discussion was customarily done before the quiet time, which always signaled the beginning of the meeting. It was customary to have a leader, who could begin discussion promptly and on a proper topic. It was customary to assign the leader at least one week in advance to allow for preparation, which seemed to avoid much confusion for newcomers.

The meeting then would close with the Lord's Prayer. This procedure was sent to all of the groups in the form of a bulletin in early 1941, thus setting the form of defining customs and traditions. It was made clear that the Thursday meeting was intended to be an informal meeting group for new people. By this time, Chicago had a central Committee, a Set-up Committee (for the Tuesday meeting), and a Committee on Finance.

At the end of April 1942 the Old Club Room closed and the office moved to 209 South State Street, and remained there until February of 1948, when the office moved to 123 West Madison.

The first Chicago breakfast was held on St. Valentine's Day 1943, at the Hayes Hotel on the South Side. Seven members attended the first meeting.

By October 1, 1943 a committee was formed to set up guidelines and establish procedure for financing a new Club House, and the Club Room opened at 189 West Madison. By this time the group had grown to \_\_\_\_\_ members. At about this time the Set-up Committee appointed a public relations committee consisting of Lewis H., Elger B., Chan F., Clem L., and Leslie S.. They were all newspaper people and were designated to handle inquires for information and to provide appropriate speakers as requested.

On October 5, 1943 at the Fourth Anniversary meeting of the Chicago Group, Judge John T. gave his famous talk, which was later transcribed and formulated into the first Chicago pamphlet, entitled AA - God's Instrument. This was very much in line with AA tradition at the time, when many large groups developed their own pamphlets. The first AA pamphlet was known as the Houston Pamphlet (1941). Also Cleveland and Akron developed their own pamphlets and a very widely used pamphlet was developed in Washington D.C., which was an outline for four meetings to indoctrinate the newcomer,

although this pamphlet may have been first used in Detroit (at this time it is not clear). Subsequently Chicago developed several pamphlets, which are used and recognized, even today, world wide.

In November 1943 the Set-up Committee suggested another custom for the groups. They recommended as general policy that outsiders attending the Chicago Group meeting be kept at a minimum in respect to the anonymity of the group members. It was suggested that several group members be consulted before bringing outsiders to the group meeting. It was pointed out this was not a binding regulation, but a suggestion and should be accepted.

1944 was a very exciting year of growth for Alcoholics Anonymous in Chicago, beginning in March with the first meeting of the Evans Avenue Group, the first well-established and continuing black AA group in the United States. In April the Tuesday Night Open moved to the Engineering Building at 205 W. Wacker. The meeting had grown to about 750 people.

In June, there appeared the first issue of the *Grapevine* and in December of 1945 it was adopted as the national medium for Alcoholics Anonymous. Also in June of 1945 the 10th Anniversary meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous was held in Cleveland, with over 3,400 members from across the country in attendance.

In April 1946, the name of our national magazine was changed to the *AA Grapevine*, and in this issue Bill Wilson began publication of the Twelve Traditions for the first time. These would eventually be accepted by the groups and bond the fellowship together. Shortly thereafter Bill W. sent a communication to the Trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation, which eventually affected Chicago, via the restructure route. Leonard Harris, chairman of the Alcoholic Foundation, responded to Bill's suggestions for structure and organization for A.A., rejecting many of these suggestions, yet producing something which was in accord with Bill's ultimate goal, which was the formation of the General Service Conference.

The Tuesday meeting in Chicago moved to 32 West Randolph in May. At the May 1946 meeting of the Set-up Committee, it was announced that each of the six areas — North, West, South, North Suburban, West Suburban, and South Suburban — would have one representative on the newly formed Policy Committee. The committee would meet from time to time as needed and would make recommendations to the set up committee. The set up committee was made up of one representative of each Thursday Night Group. This idea was in line with Bill W.'s Twelve Traditions and was discussed

with Bill and numerous older members of the Chicago group. The policy committee was very much similar to the General Service Board which we know today.

In August of 1946 the Chicago office was fortunate to hire Dorothy Garland as an Associate Secretary. Dorothy eventually replaced Grace Cultice (upon her death) and served the fellowship until retirement in 1967.

January 8, 1948 delivered Chicago Area AA an unwelcome visitor, the death of a loved one. Grace Cultice, Chicago's longtime secretary, friend, confidante, and inspiration, passed away. Grace had applied the AA principles in her life and loved the Chicago Group. On February 2, 1948 the Central Office moved to 123 W. Madison.

As we know A.A. teaches us if we have difficulties we need to get busy with the work of the program. In January 1948, Bill Wilson announced the route of his national tour promoting the General Service structure. Preparations for Bill's visit sent the Chicago Group into frenzy. Finally it was decided to have a dinner at the Palmer House followed by Bill's speech to present his ideas to the group. On April 26, Bill spoke to the delegates from in and around the Chicago area. Luke H. served as chairman. The groups reported back to the Central Office in favor of adopting Bill's plan for the General Service Conference.

After this meeting Bill asked that the Chicago Rotating Committee be changed somewhat. First the Policy Committee would become part of the Rotating Committee. This would be similar to the General Service Broad. The reason for this change is it would give Bill an opportunity to see how the General Service Conference would work in practice.

In May of 1949 the first issue of *Here's How* came off the presses, with a run of 4,000. Chicago now had its very own group newsletter. The idea had come about a few months earlier with a meeting of Luke, Earl, Elgar B, and Bill Y., because of Luke's growing concern about maintaining the unity of the group. Bill Y., a dedicated newspaperman, agreed to serve as editor, a post he held for eight years until Luke H. took over and served until he retired in 1965. An early decision was that *Here's How* would go to every AA listed at the downtown office, and that payment (other than for members in other cities) would be voluntary.

On June 1, 1949, Anne Ripley Smith died in Akron. Anne, who did so much in developing the early recovery and played a formative role in development of the spiritual aspect of Alcoholics Anonymous, will long be remembered. Anne had grown up in the Chicago area, in west suburban Oak Park.

In February of 1950 the *Chicago Daily News* ran a series of seven articles, complete with photos, some of which had been posed by models from an agency.

July 28-30, 1950 marked AA's 15th anniversary and the First International Convention in Cleveland. The highlight was the unanimous adoption of the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous by the Convention. On Sunday afternoon 7,000 jammed into the Cleveland to listen to Dr. Bob's last talk.

Because of the huge growth of the Chicago group, in late 1950, Regional Tuesday Night meeting began.

Close to noontime on Thursday, November 16, 1950, Dr. Bob passed on. The nurse in attendance stood by his bedside. Dr. Bob lifted his hand to the light, and with a final confirming glance he spoke, "you had better call the family, this is it." Following Dr. Bob's death, Earl T. was chosen to replace him as Trustee of the Alcoholic Foundation.

On February 13, 1951, with Bill Wilson in attendance, Luke H. was elected as the first Chicago Delegate to the General Service Conference. The Alternate Delegate was George T. Both were elected unanimously, and without opposition. Following the meeting Bill Wilson gave a talk on the history of the Big Book and early AA.

The first General Service Conference was held April 20-22, 1951. Thirteen Conference Advisory Actions were passed. This was a true milestone in AA. The groups were finally going to have a voice in the International Structure of Alcoholics Anonymous.

In March of 1952 the Rotating Committee voted to send out the gratitude request for contributions at Thanksgiving instead of January. This custom has remained unchanged until the present time. Also in late March a committee was formed to organize the Hospital & Institution Committee.

In April the Joint Committee voted to initiate a "Crusade" for more thorough sponsorship and emphasize the importance of every member owning a Big Book. This campaign would be kicked off by *Here's How*, with May or June as Big Book Month.

In August, 1953 the Metropolitan Rotating Committee sent a memorandum to all groups reaffirming the Twelve Traditions and restating certain Chicago customs. The memo read:

In October of 1953 the Metropolitan Rotating Committee restructured and enlarged the Policy Committee, Financial Committee and Public Relations Committees with Earl T. as ex-officio member of all committees.

At the February 23,1954 meeting of the Metropolitan Rotating Committee a plan was presented by Luke H. which had been unanimously approved by the Policy Committee and the Finance Committee. The program would require the full time employment of one of the group. This proposal had been cleared with Bill Wilson in regard to conformity with A.A. Tradition. The Policy Committee and Finance Committee recommended that Earl T. be asked to fill this position. Earl accepted provided that none of the money paid to him come from the Central Group funds. It was reported at the meeting that a number of groups stood ready to raise the funds in the form of special gifts.

Almost immediately the Rotating Committee's action was challenged by a group of dissenters. Led by the Westside group, a letter was sent to Earl Treat requesting certain information regarding past finances, membership of combined committees, etc.

On March 11, 1954 a meeting of the joint committees was held, chaired by Luke H. All questions from the dissenting members were answered. Earl T. reiterated that the Chicago Structure, Policy, Finance and the other Committees and the Rotating Committee were set up on the advice of Bill Wilson as a demonstration of representative AA government. Later the national organization was set up after the Chicago pattern with the trustees recommending and the General Service Conference making the final decision.

At the April 20, 1954 Joint Committee meeting, a special Structure Committee was appointed. Subsequently a report was presented to the Joint Committees with recommendations that the committee at present stand as it was with no modifications at that time. A motion was made, seconded, and passed that a poll of the individual groups be taken on the question of Special Coordinator. This action to poll the groups was rescinded by the Rotating Committee at their May 25, 1954 meeting. Also at the meeting it was announced that Ernst & Ernst CPAs be engaged to provide a Certified Audit and make certain changes in the bookkeeping system.

At the June 29,1954 Metropolitan Rotating Committee meeting a final report of the Special Structure Committee was presented. This report was mailed to all group secretaries, and printed in *Here's How*. A nominating committee was appointed by the chairman following adoption of the plan by a vote of 13 to 5. At this time the Chicago Group was composed of seven sections: Southeast, Southwest, North, Madison-Devon, West, West Suburban, and North Suburban. In late 1954 the Fox Valley District was added and in January 1955 the Calumet Area District was included, expanding Chicago to nine Districts.

In February the Finance Committee announced the incorporation of two not-for-profit corporations, one called *Alcoholics Anonymous* and the other called *A.A. of Chicago Inc.* Also the Metropolitan Rotating Committee was notified by letter by the South, West and North Intergroups (which had split from the Chicago Group to operate directly with the General Service Office) stating that they wished to discuss the manner of their participation in the selection of the delegate to the General Service Conference.

In May of 1955 the Chicago Central Office moved to their present location at 250 W. Wacker. Although the office relocated several times within the building, the address remained unchanged until December of 1996.

In the meantime there was no resolution of the separation of the intergroups from the Central Group. Year after year the intergroups requested relief from the General Service Conference Secretary. Each year the General Service Conference Secretary reminded the two factions this was an area problem and that each area was autonomous.

Meantime the special coordinator was busy on many projects, such as the twenty-four conference at the McLaren Center in Sycamore. This was a voluntary workshop for the rotating and service committees. These workshops continued for several years.

Earl worked with the courts to try to set up an AA volunteer program for the "skid row" court, women's court, and other courtrooms. Another project was to try to iron out a program of cooperation with the various state hospitals: Mantino, Elgin, etc. This was arranged through the State Department of Public Welfare.

In August 1955 Earl T. became gravely ill and was unable to carry out his duties. The Policy and Finance Committees assured Earl that they needed his help, but only when he was well enough to resume his duties with no risk to his health.

In September 1955 the structure committee rewrote the Chicago structure, affirming the four committees. Finance, Policy, Public Relations, and Hospital were advisory in function only and could take no action unless approved by the Metropolitan Rotating Committee.

In January 1956 the Metropolitan Rotating Committee adopted on a six-month trial basis a plan of direct sponsorship. Prospects would be channeled directly into neighborhood groups. Records were kept for a future repot. Three random calls per week were selected for distribution throughout the Metropolitan Service Committee members. In February 1956 the Calumet Area groups withdrew from the Chicago Group, returning the area to eight groups.

May 1956 saw more revisions instituted for the structure of the Chicago Metropolitan Group. The Policy and Public Relations Committee were combined. The Metropolitan Rotating Committee was changed to bimonthly meetings Selection of delegates was made entirely the responsibility of the districts. Delegates terms were changed to two-year terms.

In September of 1956, the Metropolitan Rotating Committee adapted a Sponsorship Plan. Ten percent of all twelve-step calls were turned over to the Rotating Committee and others to be indoctrinated and sponsored into neighborhood groups. Only males were handled initially. In the pilot program of 1956, 70% had remained sober when contacted by Earl T.

Finally after years of controversy, Metropolitan Chicago and the Intergroups met together for the purpose of selecting a delegate to the General Service. This delegate was George G., a member of Intergroups. George gave his report at the Metropolitan Rotating Committee in 1961 and 1962.

On October 16, 1962, the Chicago group lost its first sober member, Earl T. His passing marked the beginning of the end of the era of the founders of the Chicago Alcoholics Anonymous Group. Earl had been sober for twenty-five years and five months. Earl often reminded his fellow A.A's that the Twelve Steps are worthy to be received as they stand by all men. Although Earl was a shining example to newcomers, he remained a handyman in practice, doing the chores. He answered the calls for help, frequently taking newcomers with him because he believed that everyone should have Twelfth Step Experience as soon as ready. Sponsorship was thorough.

Under Earl's influence, of the first fifty members in the group thirty-five were sober at the time of Earl's passing of had remained sober until their death. Earl was fond of repeating the well-known statement by Dr. Bob: "This is your program, keep it simple." Dr. Bob said it, and Earl practiced it, to the great benefit of those he left behind him.

In March of 1963, the ongoing squabble between the Metropolitan Rotating Committee and the Chicago Intergroups finally came to an impasse. The General Service Conference Committee on admissions refused to seat either representative from MRC or intergroup and so notified each. Subsequently an agreement was worked out between the two factions, following the General Service committee's recommendation that the intergroup delegate, Paul M., would fill out the 1963-1964 term, that Chicago would send delegates for the 1965-1966 and 1967-1968 panels, and that Intergroup would again send

their delegate in 1969-1970. Following that another meeting would be held to determine what action would be taken.

At the June 1967 MRC meeting, it was quite regrettable to announce that Dorothy Garland had indicated that she would like to retire on August 1,1967. Dorothy joined the staff as assistant secretary in August of 1946. The entire MRC paid tribute to Dorothy for her service to Chicago Alcoholics Anonymous. The Finance Committee indicated they had already engaged a professional firm to make a list of requirements necessary to staff the office. Subsequently Ted Solmundson was hired as the new office manager.

In January of 1969, the combined Intergroups notified the MRC they would be relinquishing their privilege of selecting the Chicago delegate to the General Service Conference every fifth and sixth year per the agreement of 1963 between the Chicago Metropolitan Group and the Intergroups. This action laid much of the groundwork for reuniting most of the Chicago groups. However the Intergroups continued to function until about 1973.

January 24,1971, saw the passing of the co-founder of our fellowship. Following a long illness, Bill Wilson was laid to rest in East Dorset, Vermont. The news was carried in all major newspapers and most television networks.

As of March 1971, as a result of a special meeting of the MRC, the Policy Committee and the Public Information Committee separated to make more information to the general public. Although we are anonymous we are not secret.

Also in 1971, the Metropolitan Group and the Intergroups began holding "Common Services Committee" meetings to explore ways of improving common service needs of the Chicago area. Out of this effort came an area directory sub-committee, a public information sub-committee, and an institutional sub-committee. These meetings continued through 1971 and 1972.

In early 1972, a search was started for a new office manager. This search continued for several months and in November of 1973, Jim E. became Chicago's second office manager.

Later in 1973, in order to better establish communication with the General Service Conference and the groups within the Chicago area the service structure was amended and revised as follows:

OLD:

Chicago Metropolitan Group Metropolitan Rotating Committee Delegate to M.R.C. Sectional Rotating Committee General Service Representative

NEW:

Chicago Area Alcoholics Anonymous Chicago Area Service Committee District Service Representatives District Service Committee General Service Representative

This would allow local and General Service Conference matters to be discussed at the same meeting. South Suburban District was added in May 1973. This brought the number of districts back to ten.