

Earl H 1991

TRACK01

I'm Earl Husband and I'm an alcoholic.

I volunteered for Sherry here a few months ago to talk about the history of AA.

Many of you new people that are here tonight probably are not aware that Alcoholics Anonymous started in Oklahoma September 14 1941. That was 50 years ago a couple of weeks ago. I was privileged to speak in Seattle last summer on the archives. One of the things I heard up there from a friend of mine up in New York says "Whenever a society or civilization fails, there is always one condition present. They forgot where they came from." Carl Sandburg.

Alcoholics Anonymous did not just happen in Oklahoma. We had a man that got sober in Chicago June 7, 1940. He got sober in Earl Creek's group, the man who got sober in Dr Bob's in 1937. His name was Johnny Poole. And he moved to Kansas City. He was a candy salesman. He started Alcoholics Anonymous in Kansas City and he started correspondence with New York. He started writing Ruth Hock, the secretary that wrote the Big Book. Bobby Berger took her place in March 1942. Johnny had a lot of correspondence because he was traveling in the Southwest District and he wrote and asked who ordered the book Alcoholics Anonymous. Now this was in 1941, it was after the March 1, 1941 Saturday Evening Post with the Jack Alexander story that really broke Alcoholics Anonymous wide open. In the year 1941, the membership went from 2,000 to 8,000. Johnny wrote back and forth and found out what correspondence they had in what area. He started AA in Kansas City, and he started it in Topeka. And when he got to Oklahoma City he had five names that he got from New York. He approached these people, a man by the name of Harry Atkinson, an attorney, Ellis Fisher, a hood?? food?? broker, an attorney by the name of Melvin Bodean, and another couple that was anonymous. They only attended one meeting and never heard from them again. Johnny Poole met with them and got them together in Harry Atkinson's law office. This Melvin Bodean, he was a...

Let me tell you all where I'm coming from. Many of you don't know where I'm at. I was in the first young people's group of Alcoholics Anonymous. My wife came into AA May 3, 1954 and I came in in June of 1954. We were in the first young people's group. This is the service meeting. I attended the third service meeting in the state of Oklahoma in November 1954. I was GSR for the young people's group and there were about eight or ten groups represented at that state committee meeting. I was the GSR... I got drunk January 2, 1955, I missed two meetings, and I've been sober ever since. And five weeks later they appointed me to the State Committee. I stayed GSR for six years. Things are a little bit different today, but I wanted you to know that... I look back there and see Bob, Bob had 34 years next month and 30 years ago he was GSR and he's made the full circle, he's GSR again. And I think it's super, 79 years old and a GSR for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Anyway, Johnny Poole got these people together in Harry Atkinson's law office and one of the first things Johnny Poole said was AA is a big deal, it doesn't cost any money, etc. And Melvin Bodean, right away they hit him for \$5 for an ad to put in the newspaper.

TRACK02

September 2, 1955 I made a tape recording of the first old timers meeting in the state of Oklahoma. On this tape recording that I made in 1955 Melvin Bodean talked about that. I made this on an old reel-to-reel tape, I made all the tapes back in the 1950s and the early 1960s--I didn't even know I had this tape. Melvin Bodean showed up at this old timers meeting. The first man who got sober in Alcoholics Anonymous in the State of Oklahoma, Earl Goodenow, the 19th person to come into Alcoholics Anonymous in 1941, got sober December 26. He never took another drink. The 19th person.

You know, to get up here in 30 or 40 minutes and try to tell you the history of Alcoholics Anonymous, it's just almost impossible, so I'm going to kind of, probably scatter around this thing because there's so much I'd like to share, and because there's so many people that do not understand where I personally come from. They started a group. They started meeting on Tuesday nights in Harry Atkinson's law office. They put an ad in the newspaper and they had five post cards that returned. A man by the name of Clarence Oliver attended the second meeting, September 21, 1941. They put this ad in the newspaper, Box 202, Write Alcoholics Anonymous. They didn't put a telephone number in there then, but they did later. But they got one man that showed up for the second meeting, this Clarence Oliver. Clarence Oliver had a brother that was a night clerk down at the Biltmore Hotel. His name was Morris, a very dear friend of mine that I later came to know and love, I went to a prayer group with him for a number of years. But Morris was a drunk, he didn't know he had a problem at that time, and he allowed the AAs to have a double room, a sample room in the Biltmore Hotel where they met every Friday night and had open meetings. There were a total of 19 people who showed up from September to December 31, 1941. Those people that came in, I have their names in chronological order that they came in, and the 19th person was the first one to get sober. They had a doctor from Clinton who was dual addicted.

You know, it's real difficult for me, and I know Bob back there also to talk about these old timers that many of you all never heard of, they mean absolutely nothing to you, except that they started Alcoholics Anonymous. And you know, I've buried an awful lot of friends since I've been in AA, There's about that much space between the time you are born and the time you die and the tombstone. And these people that mean so very much to me, makes me real sad that they are not remembered more, but I don't know what to do about it. I know I feel real fortunate, in 1983 I found that no one had kept any history of Alcoholics Anonymous, no records.

Is Hazel here? Hazel's not here. I was the first Grapevine Representative in the United States, from Oklahoma. Lane Pole??, our third delegate appointed me to the State Committee five weeks after I got drunk. And at that time, I went to every group in the State of Oklahoma, with Lane. And I did that under Reuben J and George English, the fourth and fifth delegates for the State of Oklahoma. When I came into Alcoholics Anonymous, they only had 10 meetings in Oklahoma City, 6 in Tulsa, 29 over the state, and one Al-anon meeting.

These people that came into Alcoholics Anonymous in the early days had a very difficult time. They had a psychiatrist, Corin Campbell, who was to Oklahoma what Dr Silkworth was to New York in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. He loved drunks. And pretty much every drunk that came into Alcoholics Anonymous went and stayed in Corin Campbell's hospital. Pretty much it was a drying out hospital and they didn't know what to do, they tried every kind of method you could think of. I made a tape recording of Corin. Corin died in January 1957 and I was able to give his granddaughter who was born in 1959 a tape of her grandfather. He talked at this old timers meeting that I made in 1955.

TRACK03

The second man to come into Alcoholics Anonymous and get sober was a man by the name of Jack Dunn, January 7, 1940. He was the 20th person to come into AA. The type of people that came into Alcoholics Anonymous in those days, his wife had written a post card to this box number, but he got on a train and ran up to St. Louis and got back sometime in January. The police called his wife, the jailer did, and said hey, your husband's here in jail, \$10 to get him out, get him out of here. But she didn't have any money. The jailer called back that evening and said, hey come and get him, we'll drop the charges. They were afraid he was going to die. She didn't know what to do. She called Alcoholics Anonymous, called Harry Atkinson and Ellis Fisher and Melvin Bodean. They went and saw Jack and they took him to Corin Campbell's and put him in there for nine days. Nine days treatment cost \$50, and Jack never took another drink, July 1964 I believe it was [he died]. At the end of 1942, they had a total of 42 people that had come into Alcoholics Anonymous.

And Alcoholics Anonymous started to expand. In March 1943, they rented a clubhouse behind VCD, 1016 NW 42nd Street and they remained in this clubhouse until July of 1945. During that period of time you had the first woman to come into Alcoholics Anonymous was a woman named Norin?? Hefner. She came in in February, 1942. She made a few meetings and didn't stay. In June, 1942, there was a woman came in, Bertha Hartman. Dual addicted, she had a worse drug problem than she had an alcohol problem. She stayed in Alcoholics Anonymous many many years. She helped so many people, she helped so many women that came into Alcoholics Anonymous because it was very very difficult for them to stay sober. During the period after they moved into the 42nd Street Clubhouse, they grew quite a bit, the wives got involved, they had a Sunday afternoon meal, they played poker on Saturday night.

And Alcoholics Anonymous grew. They had an ad in the paper, Box 202, and it went all over the state back in those days. The small towns over the state started to write to this box number. And one or two people from Oklahoma City would go to these outlying towns and they encouraged them to come to Oklahoma City and go to open meetings. And during that time, they had open meetings held there on 42nd Street. There was a period of time...

They got kicked out of the Biltmore Hotel because Morris got drunk one time and got fired and they got kicked out. Then they went into a few home groups, then they got together and they rented this building behind VCD out there on 42nd Street. During that time, pretty much every person that came in went through Corin Campbell's hospital, as I told you, exactly the way they did in Akron and exactly the way they did it in New York City. They felt like everyone had to be detoxed. And what happened when they put someone in the hospital, all the members of AA would go up there during the time they stayed and talk to these people and tell them their story. But they felt like they had to be hospitalized. A man by the name of Harry Huggins was the first one that came into Alcoholics Anonymous that didn't go through the treatment center—Corin Campbell's. That was in August, 1943 I believe it was. He had been sober two or three weeks when he showed up at the 42nd Street Clubhouse, so he didn't go to the hospital. He was the very first one, everyone before him had been in the hospital.

TRACK04

Roy Scoville came into AA in August 9, 1942 and he drank three or four times and got sober December 15, 1942 and he never took another drink. He was our first delegate to New York City in April 1951. And since this is the service meeting, he was the State Chairman and he was also the State Delegate that first two years, 1951 and 1952. We had a secretary named John Walkerson. At that first [State] meeting they didn't know hardly what to do. I don't know exactly what happened those first two meetings. I attended the third meeting in November 1954. What happened... back in those days... this is tradition oriented... and concepts... and GSRs and all that sort of stuff, but back in those days, what happened... the traditions... I'm stuttering around on this.. maybe I ought to come up a little bit further before I get into that.

They stayed at the 42nd Street Club. Bill Wilson came up here January 18, 1944, he came here from Little Rock. On his arm he had an Arkansas Gazette paper. It had a picture of Bill and Lois on the front page with all the members of Alcoholics Anonymous in Arkansas. In the front page of the paper! And he showed showed up here at a meeting and he talked out at the 42nd Street Club. He was met by Roy and Don Burton and Fitz Burgen and Don Ellis, a bunch of the old timers. They noticed that newspaper and Bill said, "You know, I think maybe this shouldn't happen anymore. I think we should be anonymous." And when Bill left Oklahoma City, they had a front page picture of Bill, but it was on a background, a silhouette, taken down at the Skirvin Tower, they had a silhouette picture. So anonymity really started here in Oklahoma City, January 18, 1944.

At that time they had about 75 members of Alcoholics Anonymous. They were going all over the state every time someone wrote this box number. And they encouraged them to come to Oklahoma City and go to an open meeting.

July 1945, the landlord of the building they were staying at... and ??? with all the drunks... but he was renting this building to them, but he also owned VZ Drug Store on the corner where VZD's is right now. He kicked them out because the drunks

were parking in the VZ Drug Store parking lot. They had to move, and they moved July 31, 1945.

In the middle of July, 1945, they incorporated Alcoholics Anonymous for the whole state of Oklahoma because they decided to pool their resources, set up a fund and build a clubhouse. They had to move out of this clubhouse, and they went into eight home groups, they scattered all over. And during these home groups, during that period of time they started saving their money. And I have a list of everyone that saved their money and donated to building the Kelley Club—how much contributions they gave. And I'll guarantee you some of the people that contributed \$5 contributed as much as some of those that contributed \$500, because that's the way it was. In December 1945, it came out in the newspaper, the Oklahoma City Times, that Alcoholics Anonymous in Oklahoma City had saved up \$12,000 and were going to build a clubhouse at the corner of 36th and Classen. Of course they couldn't get a building permit and it didn't happen. But a man by the name of Jay Goodall, he's the one who built the Kelley Club. He came in in January, 1945, he was a building contractor. In March, 1946, they started building the Kelley Club and they moved in in the first week in June, 1946.

TRACK05

But in December 1945 there were 186 men and 12 women in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous in the State of Oklahoma. Now I told you before that people from around the state in different towns would come over here for AA meetings, open meetings on Friday night. And they had a lot of large meetings, some at the Municipal Auditorium, some at the Court House, and the Shrine on Portland. After they built the Kelley Club, it was standing room only on the outside of the building with the windows open. People came from all over the state to go to the Friday night open meetings. Then there would be one or two people from Oklahoma City going to these outlying towns and trying to start a group. It was listed in the Grapevine as each town started up their group all over the whole state.

There was a man, name of Sam Kelley, from Altus. In 1945 he caught the bus and rode to Oklahoma City and went to the meeting on Friday night... got home at 2:00 a.m. He did that every week for months. Finally there was a judge down there that came into Alcoholics Anonymous. Sam Kelley's wife bought a car, but she wouldn't put it in her husband's name, she put it in the judge's name. Then they started driving up here. Eventually they started a group in Altus.

The same thing happened over in Tulsa. There was a man by the name of Carroll McCullough. He came over here in February, 1944 and spent a couple of weeks at Roy and Lucille's house. They thought he had to be hospitalized and he went in there for two days and ran off. And he went back to Tulsa and started an AA group. And what happened in starting an AA group, there were only twos and threes and fours and fives in these small towns, and they couldn't stay sober. But they kept having meetings, and finally in June 6, 1944 Ted Riley went over there and took a meeting and tried to show them how to hold a meeting, they didn't know how.

Carroll McCullough kept a record of everyone who attended every AA meeting for the first two years of Alcoholics Anonymous in Tulsa. Meticulous folk. Had a terrible time staying sober, Ted Riley ... showed me how to do the 4th step, saved my life. Ted Riley came in February 22, 1944. His sobriety date was November 12, 1947. He started many AA groups. He started Ardmore, Ponca City, numerous towns. Same with these other old timers that came into Alcoholics Anonymous. I asked Ted in 1983 when I spent nine months going all over the state making tape recordings of all the old timers that were still living that I knew... one of the most gratifying times of my life. I'm so grateful I was able to spend all that time with people that meant so much to me. If you ever have the opportunity... It's the most gratifying thing I ever did in the last 37 years in Alcoholics Anonymous. But I asked Ted one time, I said "Ted, you came in February 22, 1944 and your sobriety date is November 12, 1947, how long did you drink in there?" He said, "Well, I only drank about 5% of that time, but I always resigned from Alcoholics Anonymous and then I rejoined when I sobered up again." You know there's so many things that happened back in those days, some of them were real funny.

They had a couple of carloads of people later on in June and July that went to Tulsa, and they went to Muskogee, and went to McAlester and came up through Shawnee. Most all the groups started just like they did in Tulsa. They may have started 4 or 5 or 6 months... kept trying to get it started, and started and started and maybe 6 or 8 or 10 months later they would register their group in New York with General Service. That's the reason I knew how many groups were registered were in... were registered in Oklahoma when I came in... 45 groups.

TRACK06

Now I didn't mean that they started, like a good example like Mike Renboldt, he got sober in July 1946 and according to the registration in New York, I think it was December 1946 before their group started. But there again the groups were started in Clinton much before then.

In this period of time between 1945 when they were kicked out of the 42nd Street Clubhouse and when they got the Kelley Club built, Jake Huddleston (Cubleson?), the man I was trying to think of a moment ago, donated the land at 2300 N Kelley where they built the Kelley Club. And of all things when I was interviewing Jay Goodall the man who built the clubhouse... they paid for the Kelley Club in one year. And Bill Wilson jumping up and down, "You can't do that!" That was the first clubhouse built west of the Mississippi for Alcoholics Anonymous in 1946. It was all against all the traditions and they had it incorporated for the whole state. What happened out of that was we had some attorneys that belonged to Alcoholics Anonymous. We proved the traditions do work. We had three men, Roy Scoville, Fritz Wigum, Don Burton that incorporated Alcoholics Anonymous in July 1945, and when they built the clubhouse they started a group... I'm not real certain at the very beginning because when I came in in 1954, [on Monday] they had a men and women's group in one end of the clubhouse and they had a beginners class. In this beginner's class they taught all 12 steps. On Tuesday night they had a mens group on one end and a

womens group on the other end of the building. On Wednesday night they had a men and women's group, and an Al-anon group. On Thursday night they had a mixed group and a young people's group. On Friday night they had an open meeting. No meeting on Saturday. They had a meeting at 2:30 on Sunday afternoon where all the home groups came in. We still had four home groups, one on Monday, two on Tuesday and one on Wednesday.

When they built the clubhouse, they had a board member from each group that met at the clubhouse. So immediately the board members started running the Kelley Club. And immediately you had friction in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous in Oklahoma because you had three people that were on the Board of Trustees of Alcoholics Anonymous Inc that built the clubhouse that wanted to run it, but the Board of Trustees [of the clubhouse] didn't want them to run it, so they cut off their money. It proves the traditions do work.

What happened too was... The Kelley Club was the wheel of Alcoholics Anonymous in Oklahoma and the outlying groups, if they wanted literature they had to buy it from the Kelley Club. And some of the board members of the Kelley Club thought they ought to make a profit out of it. And of course, Cordell, Oklahoma could order from New York just as cheap as the Kelley Club. So consequently, in the 1940s, in the 1950s, the outlying districts did not want any part of the traditions.

[unintelligible] We had a lot of bad resentments going on and consequently when we had the first state meetings in 1951, 1952, 1953, no one showed up. The whole deal of our first delegate, Roy Scoville, what he did, and he took it on as his job to visit every group in the state and educate them on the importance of traditions.

When I came in, we had five districts, the Central District in Oklahoma City, Northeast, Tulsa, Northwest, Enid, Southwest, Altus and Southeast, Ardmore. I attended my first AA convention, about 75 people showed up in Ardmore

TRACK 07

That was December 1, 1954. When they had these district meetings etc the delegates talked about the traditions and educated the people. And that's why Lane Poe asked me to be on the Grapevine Committee because they didn't have any money in New York at that time and you only had six office staff in New York, The money that... contributed...

they didn't have any money at all for... contributed. Our second delegate tried to give Bill Wilson some money and Bill refused it. Ab Abshire was the second delegate from Tulsa, 1953-1954. Ted Riley came up with the idea on January 19, 1954, he had an acreage on 16th Street. And one Sunday morning he woke up and got to thinking about Alcoholics Anonymous and he came with the idea that all the old timers were getting away from Alcoholics Anonymous and were not coming to meetings. And he came up with the idea that every year, if they'd come up with a dollar per year for their birthday, and have someone call and remind them that they had a birthday and make them kick in a buck for General Service in New York, with a maximum of \$10. And he took the idea to our delegate, Ab Abshire, who went to New York in April 1954. He presented it to Bill. Ab didn't think much about it, didn't think it would work or whatever, but Bill was real enthused about it and he

encouraged it, and in the year 1954 there were seven states had adopted that. And the next year Ab went up and talked in Hays Kansas, I made a tape recording of it. He explained all about the Birthday Plan and it got started. Now it's pretty much national—world-wide... A buck a year for your birthday... it's a wonderful thing.

Some of these old timers mean so very much to me... In 1957 there was a man named...

It was very very difficult for the women in the 1940s. A gal came in named EJ, started the young people's group in February 1953. EJ is still sober, almost 38 years. She was very instrumental in the women's group, At the Kelley Club they didn't have any furniture and she got the women together and, my gosh, she must have got 50 to 100 women, new members and started a women's group, the first women's group. Women's groups all over the United States would not stick together, they did not last because when one or more are gathered together there shall be criticism or something like that. Thought I'd throw that in there. I have fun! But you know, they bought all the furniture for the Kelley Club. They bought all the chairs and they bought the sofas.

Every Friday night after the meeting they had singing, they had Barber Shop. A man named Sleepy Chapman, 1937 worked for the police department, Randal Scanlon was Chief of Police. He had a Barber Shop Quartet that won the national championship. They went to a concert in Los Angeles, Sleepy got drunk, lost his gun, got fired and Randal became the County Attorney and Sleepy became a deputy sheriff. Sleepy got sober in October, 1943. He had more humility than...

TRACK08

Sometimes I compare some of these old timers, they had so much humility, Woody and Sleepy.

Sleepy belonged to this Barber Shop Quartet, Randal Scanlon, Sleepy Chapman, Bruce Williams, and (I can't remember, last name Wood.) Bruce was a drunk. He came into AA when he was 27 years old in 1946 and he could not get sober. And he was a member of this Flat Foot Four, this Barber Shop Quartet that won the national championship. Could not get sober. Now what's funny about Bruce, bless his heart he didn't get sober until September 1953. But May 29, 1951 they had their first Conference in the State of Oklahoma down at the Municipal Auditorium. Bill Wilson showed up, Johnny Poole, the man that carried AA to Oklahoma for our very first Convention. The thing that's funny about this, as I was making a tape of the history as Bruce remembered it... At this first convention, the Barber Shop Quartet got up and sang two songs before the convention started May 29, 1951, and Bruce doesn't remember being there. He didn't get sober until 1953. Because they didn't get sober doesn't mean they weren't so involved in Alcoholics Anonymous. There were a couple that came in, Paul and Virginia Corral, attended their first AA meeting December 15, 1945. They drove up here and went to an AA meeting at John Conley's house. They had one pint of whiskey, and they drank that between December 15 and Christmas and then remained sober the rest of their lives. Paul died in 1984 and as far as I know, Virginia is still living, sobriety date December 15,

1945. That's 46 years. Now pretty much all the old timers are gone. There have been so many that... You as GSRs and DCMs, it was different back in those days, but I'll tell you what, the delegates, they carried the message of the traditions all over the whole state. I feel so very fortunate, I was in St. Louis in 1955. Bill Wilson signed my book, his sponsor Ebby Thatcher signed my book, Sam Shoemaker, Ed Dowling, all the old timers. So I did know a lot of the old timers, and I know a lot of the history of AA and this meeting is very short. You know it's like getting one of you up here and saying "Well give me the history of the United States in an hour." That's kind of what this deal is, to try to tell you what happened in Oklahoma in a short hour, it's almost impossible. But the history of Alcoholics Anonymous is so important to remember where we came from. If you don't remember where you came from you're missing an awful lot. Sherry, I'll give you back about 5 minutes.

Hey, would anybody out there like to ask any questions. I've got a lot of knowledge of all the groups all over the whole state. I never thought about that until just now.

Did the Kelley Club really have a big sign up on the top of the building that said "Alcoholics Anonymous?" No. You had a giant bill board in Tulsa, Oklahoma that said AA, 1947, a billboard... Join Alcoholics Anonymous. Not at the Kelley Club.

On the archives, the old timers, the people that got sober before me were the ones that donated all the stuff to the archives, and we have one of the most complete archives in the United States. We have all the books, we have all the Grapevines. I wanted Hazel to be here. I've been a subscriber to the Grapevine since May, 1954, continuously, never missed. It took almost a year to put all the Grapevines together from June 1944, all of them, we have every one of them in the archives. We have all the Big Books, All the pamphlets

TRACK09

Sherry, thinking about the secretaries, we had three secretaries. From John, we had Arman Laughlin was our second secretary, and Lane Poe elected Polly Poe our State Secretary in February, 1956, and she remained our State Secretary until 1981 or 1982... Lynn?? I think took over in 1980. She [Polly] kept meticulous records, they are the best records of anyone in the United States. And from these records, we have all the complete history, we have all the newspaper clippings during this time. It's all over there, and I've read all that stuff, but if you don't talk about it, you lose it, just kind of like the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. And they did teach it different, I guarantee you they covered it a lot different back when I came into AA than the way they teach it today. Because you talk about the triangle that we adopted in 1955 in St Louis, the whole body of drunks that were there, about 5000 of us, or less than 5000, voted to accept the triangle. And the Concepts, we got a book on the Concepts in 1955. They weren't adopted, I think until 1962. But Woody Ward was talking about the Concepts all over the State of Oklahoma in the 1950s, and so was George English, and so was Reuben Jay, and Bob Reid from Altus who was our delegate in 1961-1962. And Lawrence Ferguson in 1963-1964 from Tulsa.

Tulsa's funny. They had the Parent Group, the Original Group, and the Pioneer Group. Now you tell me which one started first, and I'll tell you which one got a resentment. But that's kind of the way it was.

Any other questions?

That hospital you talked about, is that the one that's run by Nate English?? No. Corin Campbell, the psychiatrist. He was like Dr Silkworth was to New York. Corin loved drunks. He said drunks never came to him until they were dead broke, and they wanted him to help him, and then they wouldn't pay him. He charged \$50 for a week in the early 1940s. It was \$75 in 1945, it was \$125 in 1949. He built Willow View, 23rd at Spencer Road in 1949. And he built some cabins behind there. I didn't talk about Rock Haven.

Really, when I came in it was a moral issue, it wasn't a disease. I wanted to talk about some other things I didn't get into it. Maybe some other time. Thank you Sherry