

MARKINGS

YOUR ARCHIVES INTERCHANGE

VOL. XXIII • No. 2 — Winter 2003

c/o G.S.O., 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115

Back in 1986, a Warning Against Rigidity in A.A.

Bob P., who served A.A.'s General Service Office over the years in various capacities, delivered this closing talk at the 1986 Conference.

This is my 18th General Service Conference, the first two as a director of the Grapevine and A.A.W.S., followed by four as a general service trustee. In 1972 I rotated out completely — only to be called back two years later as general manager of G.S.O., the service job I held until late 1984. Since the International Convention last year, of course, I have been senior advisor. This is also my last Conference, so this is a special moment for me, an emotionally charged experience, so I have taken the liberty of writing out this talk.

Since this is listed on your agenda as a closing talk, you might reasonably expect it to relate to what has taken place at this Conference. But it won't. I'm not even going to refer to this fine Conference theme [Our Singleness of Purpose — Key to Unity], except to say it is very appropriate, and I will express my personal thoughts on A.A.'s future in a few minutes.

I wish I had time to express my thanks to everyone — in this room and elsewhere — to whom I am indebted for my sobriety and for the joyous life with which I have been blessed for the past nearly 25 years. But since this is obviously impossible, I will fall back on the Arab saying that Bill quoted in his last message, "I thank you for your life." For without your lives, I most certainly would have no life at all, much less the incredibly rich life I have enjoyed.

I came into A.A. in 1961, so I have lived through nearly half of our Fellowship's history. And with each passing year, I feel more and more blessed to have come in when many of the early giants of A.A. were still around. I knew Bill, of course, and literally sat at his feet as he spun his famous "bedtime story." I heard Bernard Smith deliver his last talk at the Miami International Convention. Brilliant and articulate, his contributions were tremendous. Marty M. helped me in my early sobriety and I even lunched frequently at the ANSA Club with "Popsie" M. who took Marty to her first meeting at 182 Clinton Street. Also with Bert T. whose loan from his mortgaged shop enabled the Big Book to be published. It was Dr. Harry Tiebout who sent me to A.A.

They are all gone now and legions more like them. The memories bring tears to my eyes. But there is one remarkable A.A. pioneer still with us today — Dr. Jack Norris. He has been a tower of strength for over 36 years. He has lived more A.A. history than the rest of us put together; indeed he not only lived it, he helped make it. Cherish him. We will not see his like again.

The other person here I must thank by name is John B. He came on board at G.S.O. in May 1984 and in due course succeeded me. Thanks to his tolerance and understanding, the succession has been effected without a harsh word or an uncomfortable situation between us. John has a fine mind and a wealth of management know-how, and he is a very active and faithful member of A.A. We are fortunate to have him in this period of some serious problems. G.S.O.'s affairs are in good hands.

Some years ago, the Conference had as its theme "Service — the Heart of A.A." If service is indeed the heart of A.A., then truly our staff members are the heart of service. Working with them these past 12 years has been not only a unique privilege, but one of richest pleasures of my A.A. life. I will always be grateful to them for having taught me so much — and for giving me so much support and love. And when I speak of the staff, I am, of course, including those devoted and able people at the Grapevine.

Nor can I let this opportunity pass without thanking another group of people: our nonalcoholic friends and co-workers at G.S.O., Dennis Manders and Nell Wing, with both of whom I have just been spending considerable time in connection with my current and continuing project of writing the in-depth history of our Fellowship. Ed Gordon and Madeline Whitlock Jordan and Shirley Grant and Dotty McGinity. Yes, and Tony and Elizabeth and Lynda (whom you all know!) and all the others to whom we all owe so much. For the rest of my life, when I refer to these extraordinary, dedicated friends, I'll write "Nonalcoholic" with a capital "N." They, too, have given me the great gift of their friendship and love.

Tomorrow we will say good-bye to our rotating trustees — an occasion that almost always breaks me up, because we at G.S.O. get to know the trustees so well. I have worked with literally scores of trustees over the years, and some of them are my dearest personal friends today. I am

