

(transcribed from tape)

20th ANNIVERSARY DINNER

ISLANDER RESTAURANT - LOS ANGELES - AUGUST 18, 1973

(Introduction - Bob B.)

"The 20th Anniversary is, I think, a good occasion for me in terms of, I was not around for the 20 years because I was still playing crazy. But about 15 years ago, when I did come around I met some people that - something happened in the process. And it wasn't to happen for another three years - before I was to get clean at the insistence of the state. And then to find out that I could come out after a couple of years and to stay clean over a period of over ten years. It wouldn't have been possible if there wasn't people like the people in this room that kind of insisted, kind of pushed, kind of bad-rapped me, they kind of held me up. They gave me all the things that were necessary, the things that I needed. And at the same time, one person that I became very close to, at that time, stayed in close touch with me over the years; giving me some confidence in terms - that I could do it if I would only try. And we've been through many trials of error in my growing up. And at the same time, we've shared a lot of heartaches and pleasures also. I'm going to let him tell you his own story in terms of what happened.

At this time, I've been going through papers - our offices and things have been in trunks of cars and back of garages - in cardboard boxes, in old filing cases, and what have you. And many of these things that I've kept over a period of years is an original set of By-laws that were adopted in 1953...August the 17th, which was yesterday -today is like a year (20 years) and one day. This set of guides that were set down in order to determine, how to run, or to govern NA as a whole - some particular guides. There have been many, many additions and changes since then. But at this time I thought it would be appropriate that I put these here by-laws in some kind of archives for safe keeping. And who better is there to give this (to), and put it in safe keeping, but the person who helped put it together, kind of shepherded it around, kept us all tied in some manner together. And I put them in a binder so that he can probably put them away with the rest of his treasures as a remembrance of - say - oh, that's where it started and this is how it is today. And I would like to, at this time, to introduce and present this here set of by-laws as a token of safe keeping and a token of whatever - I can't - don't even know the words to express it - to Jimmy K., one of the founders of NA;-- and one of the people who has been a mainstay;-- and one that keeps it together -- and has kept it together through many of the years that it has been around. So, this is the by-laws, an original set, and I'm going to give these here to Jimmy. And at this time Jimmy probably can give a little more background and highlight as to where it came from, what happened, and what's happening right now. I'm gonna turn it over to Jimmy K."

"My name's Jimmy Kinnon, I'm an addict and an alcoholic. (text of Jimmy's talk is complete and unedited) I've been on the verge of tears for about one hour here and that almost did it. But I'm not ashamed of tears anymore, providing they're the kind that are shed for something that's worthwhile. That just about wiped my brain clean, I can't even remember what I was going to say now. However, in our fellowship, at any time, our main purpose has to be always foremost in our lives: whether we're socializing with each other in our individual homes or whether we're at a gathering of this kind, particularly this kind. What I have to remember, personally, that I'm here, and possibly all of you are here because of people who'll never be here.

The newcomer is the life-blood of this organization; always has been, always will be. Bob pointed out a few people who are here tonight and some people who couldn't make it tonight. Those people we call "Trusted Servants" of Narcotics Anonymous. Mostly, anyone who takes a position or any kind of leader (whether it's Chairman of a Group, Representative of a Group, GSO Representative, Trustee, or anything else regarding this organization) just lets himself in for a lot of work, a lot of criticism, and a lot of those things that go on. But you see, we have to grow, and our shoulders get broad enough to carry these things because the life that is given to us makes everything worthwhile. If it wasn't meaningful and worthwhile, I wouldn't be here tonight. If this program didn't lift me higher, carry me further, and make me feel better than anything else ever did in my life, I wouldn't be here. That's for damn sure!

I sit up here in this chair, I've always admired these chairs but never thought I'd sit in one. I say "Yea Gods!" shades of Peter Lone, you know, where's the fat man? -- But, first things first they tell us -- You know, this is part of a dream come true; and a dream invasions great changes but progress demands many small actions. A dream doesn't come true because of one group of people, or one man, or two men, or three men. It comes true because a lot of people work at it, because a lot of people put effort into it, because a lot of people buy the idea and carry it forward. That's one of the reasons we're here.

Most of you have noticed that there are a few pictures over there on that easel. These are some of the pictures of the beginnings. We started long before NA was a reality, even in name. We grew out of a need (we grew out of a need) and we found --. Those of us who were members, had come into AA -- and found we could recover. In AA we found out that many addicts were still going down the road of degradation and death. And we thought it was right that we should try to do something.

But, you know, we're funny people, the more we try to do things together, the more we fight each other and the more we tear each other apart; tear down the very thing we try to build. And that's been the history, up until a few short years ago, of Narcotics Anonymous. We tore down as fast as we built. That's the kind of people we are and we must recognize that to recover. All of us must know the nature of the illness, the nature of the addict, and the nature of recovery. All these things are necessary to grow., and to live, and to change. And we started from resentments; resentments made us grow.

Before NA there was HFD, Habit Forming Drug Groups. These were hidden, these were two or three people meeting in apartments, here and there. Nobody knew where they were; they demanded certain things, and were dominated by one or two persons. You know, you and I don't go for authority, we don't like authority. A few of the people I met down on skid row years ago from East LA formed another group known as Addicts Anonymous. They infringed on the AA name and they died very quickly because they too were dominated by one man. We had another group started in the valley then that also called itself HFD and was dominated by one man. So we found out very early, and our experience has taught us. that we can have no bosses, no big shots in Narcotics Anonymous.

For awhile after we formed -- A lot of things happened that I'm not going into tonight ---- but due to some things that happened and due to the nature of the addict, the nature of our illness, some people were put in a position where they became the leaders again, the Great White Father. You know, we can't have a Great White Father or a Big Momma, you know, it doesn't work in this organization. And NA died once more, and the friends of ours in AA helped to pick us up, and said "Don't let it bother you". These were the real friends we had in the beginning; members of AA who believed in us, members of AA had themselves a dual problem at that time and recognized that -- they came and helped us get started again. But again and again this happened in this organization. One person would try to dominate the whole movement. And every time it happened we began to die.

Because the Traditions go down the drain when we try this. And one of the first things that we said when we met as a group in that house, #1 up there, where we formed those By-laws that Bob was talking about; where we sat together trying to iron out some of the things we wanted to do. We came down to very simple ideas. Number one, that we believed that this program of 12 Steps would work for addicts as well as for alcoholics. Two, that the Traditions must be followed if we were to grow, and grow as a fellowship that could stand on its own feet aside from and away from Alcoholics Anonymous. We could take our own place as a fellowship, and not be dominated by or affiliated with anything of anybody else. And we said we would keep a place open for at least two years, and if in two years one or two addicts showed that this program could work for them, we would have felt that it had been worthwhile.

That, fundamentally, was what we started with. But we argued about it for about six weeks before we put those By-laws on paper, and then we didn't want the By-laws. The sooner, I figured, we could get rid of the By-laws, the better off we'd be; because the policies of the Traditions are enough to guide us in what we have to do. The Traditions will save us from ourselves. And this is what is so necessary for a fellowship like ours. this is life -- the other way is death as we know it. But how hard and how difficult it is not to go back? How difficult!!!

The first big order of business we had when we got together was the name. I was the first Chairman of what we then called - uh - nothing. AANA, that's what it was called and I said "You simply can't do that". You made me your Chairman, we're gonna have to find another name, we can't call ourselves AANA or NAAA. And the Committee who voted me the Chairman immediately vetoed what I said. Right, that's a good way to start. They vetoed everything I said the first night, so I thought I was off

to a pretty good start. I wasn't going to get away with any horse shit from these people. They were going to find out what was right to do. And so the first order of business was to contact Alcoholics Anonymous to find out if we could use their name; and they found out that you couldn't do it. So I got the satisfaction, at least, of being right on the first thing that they vetoed. That made me feel a little better, you know, because I got news for you, I get my own way most of the time. I know you recognize that, because so do you. That's the kind of people we are.

But we had a lot of trouble when we first got together; because I'm just like you are and you're just like I am. You're going to have to show me that what you say is going to work or I ain't going to go along. And thank God we are like that. I think that's what makes this program work eventually.

It was very hard to find a place to meet; after we got together and agreed what we were going to do. You couldn't find a hall to meet in. Nobody would allow us in. They didn't trust us in any way, shape, or form. And it's pretty sad when you go from one place to another after you've got something real good going and nobody will let you use their hall. You know! Eventually we did find a Salvation Army hall and they allowed us to use it for five dollars a month. You know, that's pretty good, but there were no facilities there. There was one little restroom with a hand basin and a bowl in there, and that was it. There was no kitchen, so we had to go out and buy a little electric stove and some coffee pots, some cups - which I still have at home. I found them just this week; I've had them all these years. We used to give them to each other because this week you might meet at my place - which is the second picture up there - and next week we might meet at your place. So you took the cups with you so everybody would have a cup to get their coffee in. You know, not many of us had more than a couple of cups in our houses then; in fact, not many of us were working. But that's the way it was. I still have those things.

On the table here is the copy that we drew up, or rather Doris drew up, and Guilda, for the newspaper as our announcement that we were now in business. You know, we now had a hall, we now had a set of By-laws, and we now had a purpose. And it says here:

“NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

OUR PURPOSE”

“This is an informal group of drug addicts, banded together to help one another renew their strength in remaining free of drug addiction. Our precepts are patterned after those of Alcoholics Anonymous, to which all credit is given and precedence is acknowledged. We claim no originality but since we believe that the causes of alcoholism and addiction are basically the same we wish to apply to our lives the truths and principles which have benefited so many otherwise helpless individuals. We believe that by so doing we may regain and maintain our health and sanity. It shall be the purpose of this group to endeavor to foster a means of rehabilitation for the addict, and to carry a message of hope for the future to those who have become enslaved by the use of habit forming drugs.”

“STARTING MONDAY NIGHT OCT. 5, 1953
EACH MONDAY NIGHT THEREAFTER AT 5:30 P.M.

CORNER OF CANTARA & CLYBOURN, SUN VALLEY, CALIF.
DIRECTLY BEHIND SUNLAND LUMBER COMPANY”

I got news for you, the Sunland Lumber Company is now defunct, but we're still living. The Salvation Army hall is still there - there are 2 pictures if it up on the top line - it is now a Spanish church. Some of the other pictures up there are where we had some of our "Rabbit Meetings". We called them "Rabbit Meetings" then because we never knew where we were going to meet. If there were 5 or 6 of us at a meeting tonight we decided then whose apartment or whose house we'd have the meeting in next week. And you would take the cups and sugar bowls and the format with you, you know, and then we'd meet at your place next week.

It wasn't that we who were getting into the program then were so afraid of the law but the newcomers were scared to death. I made a sign and we put it outside of the front door of the church there (about twice the size of this - three times the size of that) that said NA Meeting tonight at 8:30. And then we opened the door for business and we'd get about a dozen alcoholics in there who came to help us. And then a car would pull down around the corner slowly and they'd look at the sign and then they'd split.

Nobody trusted nobody - you know they thought it was staked out. They wouldn't believe us when we told them there was no surveillance. And we weren't just too sure in the beginning ourselves.

Because as a group we decided we were going to get right with the law at least and we went down to the Narcotics Division. And we told them, we didn't ask them, we told them we were going to have a meeting of addicts. And they raised their eyebrows a little bit when we first mentioned it. But there were 5 of us down there. A Miller, I forget if he was a Lieutenant or a Captain then, he listened and he said: "It's about time something like this happened, I've been trying to help addicts for years and with no success; I can't help anybody". And so he called in a lieutenant to listen in on our conversation and see what he thought. And he was a hard-nosed, old style, hope-to-die cop who knew for sure (who knew for sure) that none of us could recover, you know. And he listened and Miller was saying: "I like that idea", "I'll go along with that idea", "I buy what you have to say", "I'll do everything I can to help you". All the way down the line he was all for us. He kept his word, by the way. And he said to this lieutenant "what do you think?" (lieutenant): "Ain't gonna work, once a Junkie always a Junkie, you know that, God Damnit. There's never any of them gonna get any better. I don't care what you say, I don't care what these people say, it ain't gonna work." So he looked back at us and I didn't know what the Hell to say, you know I'm only one of the group. I looked at Doris and she didn't know what to say. And Frank didn't know what to say. And old Pat, who was sitting back there with his mouth shut all this time and never opened his mouth says: "Lieutenant, my name is so-and-so, I was born and raised in such-and-such a place, I got arrested the first time for such-and-such a thing, and I was sentenced such-and -such a time for so many years; and starting there I want you to go back and check my record all the way through. I've been in every God Damned Federal Pen., except Danamora, in the country. I'm the last of the Petermen, and I haven't had a bit of Junk for 18 years. I haven't been in Jail for 18 years; and this program works for me. Now you look it up and prove it to yourself because I was never out of jail from the time I was a kid until the time I found this program." And the guy didn't know what to say. Pat said: "Now I mean it, check it out."

Whether the guy ever checked it out, I don't know; but I know that the police department and the Narcotics Division kept their word to us. And they never staked us out, they never busted us in any way, shape, or form - never roused us coming or going to meetings. And so, we in turn kept our word, we policed ourselves and we followed the Traditions as best we knew how. And this is what has made us basically begin to grow in the past 12 years.

A few of the other buildings on that - a few of the pictures up there - were men, one man in particular, who started AA within some of the Federal Institutions many years ago and helped us start Narcotics Anonymous in Walla Walla, in San Quentin, and a few other places. Les has since died too.- (I don't know what the hell I made these notes for, anyway, 'cause I'm not following them.)

We did begin in 1960 again, the beginning of 1960, with about 4 people. And started to build the group up again according to the original concept; the Steps for the individual and the Traditions for the groups. And we've been growing slowly and steadily ever since. Primarily, I believe, we've been growing because we haven't had the domination of any one group of people; particularly in the area that most of us know, California area. I think primarily that is the reason, the main reason for the big difference. Plus the fact that more and more addicts know the value of 12 Step work. It used to be we could never get addicts to go on 12 Step calls. Some strange things used to happen, you know, when about 8 or 10 addicts, in a group, would descend on some poor, unsuspecting little Junkie who was dying in a back room someplace in his mother's home. And we'd descend on him like hornets - whooo! You know! Everybody'd get scared - we had to go in groups because nobody would go alone or singly or in couples to go. Everybody was afraid they would get loaded if they went and called on another (another) addict. So that was another one of the myths that we build up ourselves - that we can't go and call on somebody who's using without using ourselves. One of the greatest lies of all time. You know it ain't true, not a damn bit true. And this is one of the reasons we grow. Plus the fact that we follow, possibly, the best thing that any of us can do, we are willing to listen.

Bob, what did you do with my other notes? Steal them? Oh, here they are.

I resigned one time as chairman of NA before I really got going again, because of the very thing I'm talking about. I resigned because we were not following the Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous. It's a strange thing, I said I was going to mention it tonight and then I decided against it, but I am going to talk about it. Because, actually, although we had meetings going for several years, about 4 years - there

was no Narcotics Anonymous. Because one of the things we said - that we would call ourselves an NA Organization and Fellowship as long as we used the Steps and the Traditions. So when we stopped using the Traditions and became a one man rule proposition there was on longer really any NA. I mention it for two reasons; because it died out and there were only a few of us left, but it also points out the fact that this program, once we begin to live it, we can't let it go, it's going to grow again. This program is not going to die out, if all of us in this room right now - and this is a miracle in itself - if all of us in this room don't make it, this fellowship is not going to die out. Not because I say so, but because that's the very nature of recovery: that once there is the knowledge that something can be done it is never lost. Somebody will pick it up and continue. We've come an awful long way. I paraphrase commercials an awful lot and there's a good paraphrase in our structure of Virginia Slims; "You've come a long way baby (you know) to get where you are now". And, I'm not going to say a Hell of a lot more because - uh - I'm too high right now - I'm going through the ceiling right now.

We're growing faster now than we ever did before. We're in more states, we're in more countries, and there are more opportunities for each and every one of us to find our place in Narcotics Anonymous and carry the message of recovery to addicts all over the world now. We can no longer try to contain it here in California or in this country. But it's going to take everything all of us got, it takes everything we've got to stay on this program. This is a blood and guts program. This is not a program for panty-wastes; but there are no panty-wastes in NA. If you're an addict you've got a lot of guts to begin with, or you wouldn't be here; so let's put them to good use. Let's take this thing that we've got and make something better, even than it is, out of it.

You know that I've said many times, a long time ago, that a man without a dream is only half a man, and a fellowship without a vision is a farce. And I still believe that and know damn well that we can find fulfillment in living a day at a time here. And a day at a time our vision and our Fellowship can become a greater reality. They're the things that I'm still interested in. Two years ago at the convention, when I had just regained my voice, I said then that as long as I live I would use what voice and what strength I have to further the efforts of Narcotics Anonymous and that other beautiful fellowship I belong to, Alcoholics Anonymous; and I intend to do that. But it's going to take all of me, and it's going to take all of you, and all the people that you're going to talk to, and all of the people you're going to carry the message to, to make this a greater reality.

There are people out there on La Cienega Boulevard dying of our disease. There are people all over this world dying of our disease, and, believe it or not, we are truly the only people who can really help them. Let's never forget that. You and I have been given, through illness - through suffering - and through disease, a talent for helping other human beings like ourselves. Let's never forget that we have it and that we are responsible for others. But primarily, we must be responsible to ourselves and - I seldom talk about Higher Powers, the particular concept of a Higher Power that I have, around the group; but believe me I have it. And, I don't know how many people are in this room tonight. I don't know if there's 100 here or 110 or 112, but over and above all of us, and in and through all of us, there's a power that there isn't anywhere else in the world. That's what Narcotics Anonymous is all about. That's what it will always be all about. And I'm serious tonight - I'm live serious not dead serious. This is a program of life and living. I've been serious long enough and I hope for the rest of the night we all have a Hell of a lot of fun, because that's what living's all about - thank you very much."