

11/14/86

JACK P.

In 1984 the World Service Conference voted to assign to the World Service Office some joint work and responsibility for development of a document or pamphlet or publication on the history of Narcotics Anonymous. It is a project that had been floating around in the Literature Committee for some time prior to that and not a whole lot had gotten done. We've been sitting on it now for 18 months and in sense we've finally concluded that it was time to get off our rear ends and get something done. We had wanted to get a chance to talk with Jack, whom we had met about 14 months ago, and we were greatly impressed with his early knowledge and association with the beginnings of Narcotics Anonymous, and we wanted to take some opportunity to get to know him and to begin to gather what information and knowledge we could from him about the early days of N.A. When we talked about this over the last few months we were uncertain as to which direction to go, how should we initially proceed to gather him together and get as much information as we could. Along the way we felt it would be desirable and helpful to gather the information in such manner that the Fellowship at large might avail themselves of, I want to say the interview that we might have conducted, and also to be able to use the information in a positive way as a definite resource of the early history. About eight weeks ago when we talked about scheduling this interview with Jack, we came up with the idea of maybe having the interview done with members of the Board of Trustees and a few others, rather than just doing it by members of the World Service Office staff or a small group of people, and it was for that purpose, then, that we set about arranging for this evening's meeting and getting us together. This is more of an inquisition, maybe, Jack, than anything else. We didn't necessarily intend it to be an N.A. recovery meeting, but those of us who bow to N.A. membership, of course, wholeheartedly would let you take over from this point on. For the sake of those who will be listening to this tape at some future time, I wanted each person who was here to say hello and identify who they are, partly for your edification, but also so that those who may listen to the tape may have a better appreciation and understanding for this gathering. We selected a dinner as a means of doing this so as to be more informal and make it easier for us to talk about those early times that most of us don't know too much about, and kind of with that in mind, while you munch your salad, if we can for a while at least keep part of our discussion directed towards the idea that we'll record this at the same time, it won't sound like a herd of grazing elephants. With that in mind, I did want to maybe start with Jack and you could introduce yourself and say a few words about. . .

Jack: I'm Jack Prose, an alcoholic, and it was my privilege in 1946 to be involved with the beginning of the Los Angeles Institutional

Committee, which is now called the H&I Committee. A woman named Wynn Laws and I did the ground work for two years in trying to interest the various institutions, both hospitals and jails, and allowing the program of Alcoholics Anonymous to be presented in those facilities. We had very little success in this in the first two years, but at one particular time ex-Sheriff Bisculous was contacted and he was the instigator of allowing our program to be put into the institutions, so for the next few years the institutions were amenable to Alcoholics Anonymous being presented. It was about this time that there was a captain in the Sheriff's Department who was in charge of the Narcotics Division who had found that we of A.A. had seemingly done a good job and were doing things that they had never found having been done prior within the institutions as far as relationship of rehabilitation was concerned, and he was concerned about the fact that there was getting to be a greater influx of the narcotic addicts that he came in contact with under his line of business. So he contacted the chief of the Care and Treatment Division under which we were allowed into the jails to ask if he would be able to ask me if there was a chance of doing something of a like kind for the addicts within the institutions. What he talked to me about, and this was in, oh, about May of 1953, as near as I can check back. And we had some discussions about this, and I was very reticent to do anything at all because I'm not an addict and I knew nothing at all about that portion of the addictive field. But he kept insisting that there should be something, he felt, that could be done and that it could be done maybe on the same premise of A.A. that we were doing into the institutions and if I could find a way to start a meeting he would see that some of the addicts that were under his eyes would be there. And so with that little introduction, about the middle of June of 1953, I started a meeting on Moore Park at the church for the addicts, knowing absolutely nothing about it. He had sent three, two people from his jurisdiction who were addicts, down to the meeting, and forced them to come, of course. Two others came in. There were two girls that came from, one was here in Los Angeles, the other one was up from San Bernardino who had heard about it and came. A man named Cy Malas came to that first meeting, and we opened it the same as we did with A.A., and the discussion was on the line that all new starting groups have, you know, what is it all about, what am I going to get out of it, what do I have to do, what's it cost, and the whole bit. And as near as I can recall, about the only thing that was discussed was the fact there was not going to be a cost factor. There was not going to be any musts that you must do, any different than there was in A.A., and that perhaps if the 12 Steps were used, changing the word "alcoholics" to the narcotic addict, that the same principles might work. Cy attended the next meeting, and then for some reason he decided this was not really his cup of tea, and so he didn't come back for the third week, but Jimmy Kennan did. I had known Jimmy in Alcoholics Anonymous, the North Hollywood group, for quite some time, and we had become very close friends, and I had talked to him about this thing, knowing that he was an addict, and never thought to ask him to come and help. But he showed up, and I stayed with it for eight weeks. Then I had to give it up because I

didn't understand the narcotic people. They were very strange to me. One meeting they came in and they were bright-eyed and they didn't look any different than anybody on the street, then all of a sudden, and I said, "am I so dull that I'm putting you to sleep?" And one young man said, "oh, no, nobody's asleep." And I said, "well, you sure look like you're asleep." And he said, "Oh, no, we're just nodding." And I thought, well, that is fine, I don't understand nodding at all. In the meantime, Jimmy is sitting there smiling, as he always did. Then he brought Cy back, and he brought a fellow named Scott Conlan back, and he in turn brought his wife-to-be back, and they later were married, and after eight weeks in discussion about this thing, I had told Jimmy that I couldn't have any more to do with it because I didn't understand it, and he said that's fine, I'll do what I can.

About the only real service that I have done for Narcotics Anonymous in those early days was that at the first meeting, after it was over, we walked outside, the cops were sitting across the street with the lights on, and as the addicts came out the two cops were standing there with a notebook; yelled across the street, "We got you, John, we know what you're trying to do. You think you're fooling us", and this sort of thing, as you're all familiar with. And I went back to Captain Hamilton and I said, "This is not going to work because of that." He said, "We'll take care of that", and some way or another he did, and they were not roused from that time on. And so when Jimmy took it over in July of 1953, and I don't recall whether it was the middle or the latter part of July in 1953, periodically he and I would talk about what he was doing in Narcotics Anonymous, but that was the total sum of my experience, until it came time to write the first piece of literature, and Jimmy and Cy asked if I would write it. You have it in your case over there. And Jimmy and I agreed on what it said, and Cy said no, it shouldn't be done that way, it wasn't right. And after a big argument, which is normal in every group of people, which brings me to the point of understanding what a committee is. You know, a committee is composed of three people, one of whom is in the hospital and the other one is on an extended trip and that leaves one person to make the decision. And it comes out well. But in spite of that, Jimmy and I persevered and the literature was printed up by a man who is in A.A. who is a printer, who printed for free the first 500 copies of that. Several other pieces from then on out were printed by this same man as they became available, that people had written for them. That's about as far as I know about the beginnings of Narcotics Anonymous. I was asked a little later on when the Norco Facility was being brought into being and the end numbers were going to be in there, and this was even before even the fences went up. I went out with a man who is named Stone who was from the state who was going to set in the program, and with that in mind, knowing it was going to be narcotics, I suggested very strongly to him that what he should do is to get hold of somebody from Narcotics Anonymous, which was then almost an underground movement. There were very, very few,

the only one I know of is the one that was out in North Hollywood, and ask them about the program. He wanted to know if it should be a combined program of alcoholics and narcotics, and I said no. And so it was established on the fact, because Jimmy and Cy went out and they presented their program and they began a program of using the Narcotics Anonymous background and ideas and the narcotic addicts themselves to do the work within the prison. Since there were not any narcotics at that time in Chino that they could have much faith in, the authorities, the cadre, to open up the meeting of the facility was brought from the Alcoholics Anonymous meeting from the minimum side of Chino. And because of that, in the early days there were two meetings a week: one was an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, and the other was a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. I was out last Tuesday to an anniversary at Norco where they had been going for many, many years now, and seemingly with quite some success, because in the group from the outside there were two members who had gone through that institution and who had been on the streets and clean and sober for over two years each.

Unless you have any questions, that's about all that I can tell you about the early days. I have been going through a bunch of things that I have accumulated over the last forty years in the institutional activity. Somewhere in there, I have, I can recall that there was what we called a sounding board, which is a little monthly thing that's put out by the Institutional Committee, in which this was talked about, about the difference between N.A. and A.A. Later on in years there was a big discussion in the Southern California area about the influx of narcotic addicts into the Alcoholics Anonymous meetings within the prison system, and we had a full day's meeting out in San Bernardino area where we discussed this problem. And it was ascertained at that time, or it was agreed upon, that the narcotic addicts would be separated from the alcoholic addicts, if you will, in separate meetings. And for many years that held true.

I just went through your facility here. I've never seen anything like that in my life. Never, ever have I seen anything like that that has come up in the few short years, less than six years that you've arrived at this point, it's absolutely fantastic. And when I was told about your conference in London, international, with over 6,000 people, and your one in Long Beach with over 3,000 people, it is totally, absolutely amazing. That many people did not attend the conferences in Southern California for maybe the first 15 years. So there's something going on your behalf through this power greater than yourself, or God, who chooses you people to attack a problem that other people can come to and find surcease from that pain, same as they have done with alcoholics. I hope that the future is as successful or more so than what you've had to this point, and I see no reason for it not to be with your background and with the effort that you're putting into it, and with the understanding of the purpose of your whole doing, there should be no question whatsoever that in the next ten year period that Narcotics Anonymous will reach the level of acceptance that Alcoholics Anonymous does.

Q: Jack, thank you very much. What we might do is give you time to eat and maybe we can go ahead and eat, and Greg, maybe we can turn this off for a while and we'll get back to it.

[break]

Q. If I can, maybe we can munch the rest of your dessert and go back to work here just for a second. I wanted to take this opportunity to begin storing up your questions so that whatever we can learn from Jack, put him on the witness stand here or whatever. There was a brief discussion earlier during the main course, I guess, with Jack, about the early relationship, if there's any knowledge that you might have about the discussions or actions that led to appropriately or properly using the A.A. steps and traditions. I know we've heard different discussions about that and among our oldest members that we have in the Fellowship available as a resource are Bob Barrett, who is here at the table, and maybe between the two of you guys, you could help us out a little bit with that. The other thing that, when we were giving Jack the tour across the street, that we came across in our glass cabinet the early version of a publication that is printed on yellow paper and it's the publication that he referred to earlier, having helped draft into its current form or final form of what was used. It's those types of things that I thought we might try and see if we can test your memory or test Bob's early memory, or others who might have some knowledge of those early times. Jack, you want to ask that question all over again?

Jack: Well, the question I asked didn't have to do with, the question I asked earlier? The question I asked earlier had to do with the 12 concepts of A.A. I was curious because over the period,

especially the last five or six years, as we've gone through a lot of struggles, there seems to be some answers that I've seen, certainly things that relate to the problems that we are experiencing in Narcotics Anonymous and that are covered in some of the material that I've read in the 12 concepts of Alcoholics Anonymous. Jack helped me in one respect in that, for some reason I thought that the 12 concepts were much older or been in existence in A.A. for far longer than apparently they have been, and I was curious why we only adopted A.A.'s 12 Steps and 12 Traditions and not the 12 concepts as well. And Jack gave me an interesting answer, all the way through, and I don't really want to put words in his mouth if he wants to go over that ground again. I found it very interesting. I found it interesting to find out that the 12 concepts took as long as they did take, which makes sense as he explained it, that they did take long to come up because they were going through the same kinds of problems and difficulties that we've been going through, especially the last five, six, seven years. And Jack's answer is that eventually we'll develop our concepts as well, and maybe they'll come from A.A. and maybe they won't.

Jack: I think that's real true, you see, because 12 Steps came out of a discussion and included four religious books that Bill had read, and the Oxford Group. And the first six steps, not the first step, but the second step up through the seventh step were taken from the Oxford Group's principles and were incorporated into the step factor, and the others were picked up by discussion amongst the group. That came early, but the 12 traditions did not come and be put out in printed form until 1954. And prior to that they were talked about, and they were only brought forth because the New York office was getting so many letters about, from the groups, asking what they can do about this problem or that problem, the fights that they were having, asking New York to settle these things and in order to maintain their hierarchy around there without getting anybody angry, they decided to come up with some traditions that they felt would cover every and all complex of the A.A. program, group-to-group factor. And so that's how the traditions came into being, was through necessity of not having this thing get into a big political arena where everybody was fighting everybody else. And then the concepts came from the same reason. After several years of being involved in the various atmosphere and having the new people come in and talk in their way as they understand it and the old people saying, no, this is the way it is, and when they got all through doing this they thought it was necessary to have some concepts to keep the control within the membership under the philosophy. And I was telling Jack, this is what will happen to N.A., you'll go along for a while until the pressure gets so strong and so many outside people. . . when I say outside I'm talking about outside of the membership today and they come in new and they've got these bright ideas, and some of them are very good. Some of them are devastating. There will come a time when you're going to have to resolve these by bringing up your concepts of your own program. This is nothing new. Nobody should ever be ashamed or think that you're copying anything because you go back as far as the Washingtonians, who in 1840

had a higher growth in the first year than A.A. had in the first 12 years, and that was started by five men sitting in a bar who decided they didn't need to drink anymore. And the way that they would keep away from drinking was to be together and talk about the problems that they had while drinking. And they started with those five men in that bar, and then they went out on the street and they told people what they were doing. They had 500,000 members in the first year of their, in being. And they used the principles that we follow today: helping another, staying out of politics, etc., etc. And the way that they dissolved themselves was that somewhere along the way a few of the people that did not have concepts and did not have traditions decided that this is a time to make some bucks. So they fought about who was going to go out and get the money for lectures that they were having at the various schools and religious edifices. In less than six months when that started, they also became involved in the politics of the day; they were completely out of existence, and today you have to look very, very hard to find any even remote information about them. There's one little book that you can find in the library about the Washingtonians, they came in and out and in five years they had dissolved because they did not have the things that were necessary to hold them together, such as A.A. now has, with the traditions, and you also have them. It doesn't make any difference where they came from. Nothing new. Nothing new in the book of Alcoholics Anonymous that you can't look in the Bible and find. Nothing new that, he used the Sermon on the Mount a great deal, about this, and three other books to put this together. They're as old as man himself and I don't know of anybody in A.A. who has had a feeling of gee, we stole from these religious factors to put us in our philosophy, because no matter where you get it, the basic principle or the basic reason that we're all here in whatever area we're in is recovery of the one who suffers. And if it takes a bolt of lightning out of the sky to get your attention, use the bolt of lightning. And if it takes a scripture out of the Bible that makes sense to the biggest portion of the people, use the scripture out of the Bible. If it takes the concepts out of A.A.'s experience over the years to put your experience into being, use the concepts. Nothing wrong with that at all, as long as your basic intent is to offer surcease from the pain of active narcotic usage, same as with A.A. So I don't see any conflict, I've never had any conflict with N.A. using anything out of the A.A. book. I think it's marvelous that there's some good can come in that.

Q: Jack, I wonder if you'll excuse me for a second, I wanted to ask a question about those early days when you were just getting together with Cy and Jimmy and those early people. Was there any communication that you were aware of, or discussion about some formal association or non-association with A.A.?

Jack: I was telling about that, I never considered writing to New York and finding out if this new group of Narcotics Anonymous could use the 12 steps. I just went at it and did it. And Jimmy decided that wasn't right. He better find out if this was going to be acceptable, so he's the one who came up with the idea that he would write New York and find out if they would give permission to use this. And I told him I didn't think it was necessary.

Q: Was that pretty early in the process?

Jack: That was very early, very early. That was just shortly after he took over from me. Very shortly he came, it was when he was writing this pamphlet, in fact, which is, oh, within the first five or six months of being involved in this thing.

Q: You mentioned about the pamphlet. You started writing that in late 1953 or in early 1954?

Jack: About late '53. The reason this one was yellow, I suppose if this is one of the original ones, which it isn't, I have an original at home which I'll find and give to you for your archives. But it was yellow because the pamphlet that preceded this in A.A. was yellow. Thought that made a good impression, so we thought we'd make it in yellow as well. And it was written by the member of A.A., one of the first 26 in A.A. who was also the city clerk in Los Angeles, and we always called it peach pamphlet. Maybe if you've been to A.A. you've seen it, it's a yellow pamphlet about that size with two big A.A.'s on it, it doesn't have any name, it doesn't say "Is A.A. for you?" or anything else, it just says "A.A." on it. And it's just sort of a thumbnail sketch of questions and answers, whether or not you are an alcoholic. That's what that was taken off of.

Tom: I remember hearing something about a group called "hial". What was that all about?

Jack: He asked me the same thing. I've never heard of that. Never heard of that, this is the first time I've heard of it. It must have been, if it was in A.A., in the area of A.A., it had to be somewhere outside of the regular Los Angeles area, what I call the regular. At that time there were so few groups around here that you didn't have very far to travel, so it had to be someplace outside of that because I never heard of that. That doesn't mean it wasn't there, you see, I just hadn't heard of it.

Q: Bob says he has a little knowledge about that maybe.

Bob: Yeah, I was the first secretary of it. It was a group that started in Venice in the American Legion Hall, and it was formed because there was basically a place for addicts. A lady came up to me who had a brother who was running the streets of Venice, and knowing I was clean, asked me if I'd start a meeting, so addicts can go to it.