

## Minorities Within A.A. Gain Acceptance

by Gary N.

The Third Tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous states that “The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.”

On page 142 of *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, where the Third Tradition is discussed, a newcomer to A.A. announced that he was “the victim of another addiction even worse stigmatized than alcoholism,” and as a consequence, the newcomer wondered if he was welcome to join the group.

*Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, in a chapter entitled “Minorities within A.A. gain acceptance,” has a very interesting commentary on this event beginning on page 240:

“The group’s ‘oldest member’ spoke in confidence with two others. They discussed ‘the trouble this strange alcoholic might bring’ and the notion that it might be better to ‘sacrifice this one for the sake of the many.’ Finally, one of the three said, ‘What we are really afraid of is our reputation.’ And he asked a question that had been haunting him: ‘What would the Master do? No answer was necessary.”

Letters written by Bill in 1938 and 1939 placed this situation in Akron, thereby implying that the ‘oldest member’ was Dr. Bob. Retelling the anecdote in 1969, Bill finally confirmed this identification by using his partner’s name.”

This chapter continues to outline how Akron A.A. repeatedly was challenged to live by the principles of the Third Tradition long before the tradition actually was written.

The first challenge to A.A. in Akron was accepting women. Dr. Bob did not immediately warm to the concept of women attending A.A. meetings even if they “had adequate, if not impressive social credentials.” Wives had been the decision makers for many of the alcoholics, all men, but nevertheless, there were some severe stereotypes regarding “that kind of woman” that would drink too much. Such women, it was feared, would win the attention of the men of A.A. at the wives’ expense. A first woman “was thrown out of A.A. by the wives. She was so bad, they wouldn’t allow her in their homes.”

Eventually those stereotypes were overcome. Dr. Bob would hand a female over to his wife Anne, or eventually, other A.A. women as they eventually were able to join the program.

Barriers regarding race were encountered early in Akron-Cleveland A.A. as well, in the early 40’s. A black woman was taken to a Cleveland A.A. meeting, but after the meeting she was informed she wasn’t welcome at that group. Oscar, a Cleveland A.A., is quoted, “We sat in the [hotel] lobby talking with a couple of fellows, but the manager came up and said we had to leave. She was the only one, so we had to form a group for her.” And they did. “A lot of

fellows helped me. We formed a group around her in a black neighborhood . . . and the news spread . . . and pretty soon there were about 15.”

Around the same time, the first Hispanic was welcomed into Cleveland A.A. And yet another minority was welcomed into A.A. Norman Y., a blind A.A., “had the Big Book done in Braille in 1940 and sent out from the Cleveland Library to other blind members.”

While we in A.A. freely admit that nothing practiced in A.A. originated in A.A., but rather was borrowed from other places, the actions of many an early member of Alcoholics Anonymous show they were practicing many honorable principles decades before much of the rest of the American population.

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