

Bill Wilson 1958 Letter Documenting the 50%/25% Ratio of Recovery by: Gary N.

This letter is copied from the GSO Archives in New York, and is a letter that Bill Wilson wrote in 1958 commenting on the 50%/25% recovery success rate noted in the Foreword to the second edition of the Big Book - which he had written and published three years earlier.

The letter was provided to me through my association with AA History Lovers. It provides interesting support to the often discussed Forward of the 2nd edition of the Big Book and is directly from the pen of Bill Wilson:

August 12, 1958

Dear Howard,

Thank deeply for your highly interesting letter of July 29th. I was thrilled by your account of the Old Timers meeting with the vast sobriety record that it portended. And also your observations on our 50%-25%-25% claim.

I think you have something when you say that perhaps we give false hope to the newcomer by those figures. Actually, those figures have never been intended to apply to all drunks who come within range of A.A. and attend a meeting or so. They apply to those who really come in and take the treatment over a considerable period of time. On that narrow classification, I think the figures will stand up. In Philadelphia, for example, they kept records for a very long time, accurate ones. Not too long ago they case up figures on old timers which seemed to prove our claimed percentages. When the new edition of the A.A. book came out, the same thing happened. The story-tellers had better than the claimed percentage. So I think it ought to be emphasized with each newcomer that his chances are just as the figures say, provided he will jump into A.A. and is willing and capable of working at it.

There is another angle, too. As you say, an awful lot of these people get hospitalized, attend a few meetings and then disappear. What becomes of them?

Probably you've heard me tell the story about a group of 75 of these people that Lois and I once picked out of old address books from the very early days. Over the years, we located more than 60 of them. The 60 had returned to A.A. and most of them had made the grade. Some had been drunk 3, 5, 7, and 10 years. Finally, they were driven back on the do-or-die basis and really got the pitch. So our over-all claims are not excessive in my judgment.

At the office, they continue to get wonderful reports of the change in feeling in your area about the Third Legacy, General Headquarters, and even about me! It is one of the most comforting and gratifying happenings that I can remember in my long A.A. live. Again, Howard, many thanks to you and to all those who have made this possible.

Devotedly,

Bill

March 2012