

## AA Trivia (part 1)

by Gary N.

"Jim's Story" and "Fred's Story." One doesn't have to go far into the A.A. Big Book until these stories about alcoholics are encountered. Have you ever wondered if Bill Wilson made these stories up? Or were they real people?

According to the web site, [barefootsworld.net/aa-bbtrivia.html](http://barefootsworld.net/aa-bbtrivia.html), they were real people.

"Jim the Car Salesman," mentioned on page 35, is attributed to be the story of Ralph Furlong, who got sober through meeting Bill Wilson. Ralph's story is titled "Another Prodigal Story" which appears on page 357 of the First Edition. However, Jim the car salesman puts whiskey into his milk when he stops for a sandwich. Ralph's story has him practicing "a little controlled drinking": he takes a quick drink at noon "and cover[s] it up with a milk shake. To be doubly sure, [he'd] have ice cream put into the milk shake." (In New England, a milk shake is literally milk shaken in a blender without ice cream). There is no mention in the First Edition story of him being a car salesman or formerly owning the business in which he's now an employee.

"Fred the Accountant," whose story is included in pages 39-43 of the Big Book, is reputed to be the story of Harry Brick who got sober in New York with Bill Wilson as well around June of 1938. His story is on pages 252 and 253 of the First Edition. There is a marked similarity between what Bill Wilson wrote and the seven brief paragraphs that Harry wrote. Bill wrote more about Harry than Harry did when he wrote probably the shortest alcoholic story of the four Big Book editions. Both versions have Harry being hospitalized originally but he was still thinking he had not been "that bad." He rejects help from A.A. Upon being hospitalized a second time, Harry becomes much more willing to listen and joins the fellowship and becomes very active. Harry ending up sounding very much like an judgmental accountant by other behaviors that followed publication of his story. He reputedly sued Alcoholics Anonymous to get money back that he loaned in order to help get the Big Book published. He became a member of the Alcoholic Foundation after a previous member got drunk, but had to resign his membership when he got drunk himself. No information is provided regarding whether or not he died sober.

More trivia to come.

## AA Trivia (part 2)

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On page 16 near the conclusion of "Bill's Story," there is the sentence: "One poor chap committed suicide in my home." The poor chap was Bill C., who had been a guest at the home of Bill and Lois at 182 Clinton St. for nearly a year. After being away on a visit, Bill opened the door to their home and smelled the natural gas that had ended Bill C.'s life. Later, "Bill and Lois discovered that he had been selling of all of their good dress clothes to finance his drinking and gambling."

On the bottom of page 102, there are the words: "Many of us keep liquor in our homes." At least one of those people was Dr. Bob himself, who is allegedly\* quoted as saying: "I was adamant on having liquor. I said we had to prove that you could live in the presence of liquor. So I got two big bottles and put them right on the sideboard and that drove Anne wild for a while." Could Dr. Bob's insistence on liquor in his home be related to another memory contained in Dr. Bob's A.A. story? On page 181, Dr. Bob wrote, "Unlike most of our crowd, I did not get over my craving for liquor much during the first two and one-half years of abstinence." No wonder!

The bottom of page 138 begins: "I want to throw up my hands in discouragement, for I saw that I had failed to help my banker friend understand. He simply could not believe that his brother-executive suffered from a serious illness." Who was the brother-executive? According to the web site [barefootsworld.net/aa-bbtrivia.html](http://barefootsworld.net/aa-bbtrivia.html), he was Clarence Snyder, who had his story entitled "The Home Brewmeister" in the first three editions of the Big Book. Clarence was sponsored by Dr. Bob after getting sober in February of 1938, and eventually claimed to hold the first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in May of 1939 in Cleveland, Ohio using somewhat of a technicality. The book *Alcoholics Anonymous* had just been published. Clarence claimed to have held the first meeting named after the book. This made him a founder of A.A.

On page 7, a sentence begins, "My brother-in-law is a physician." That brother-in-law was Dr. Leonard V. Strong Jr., the husband of Bill's younger sister Dorothy. He was among the reasons that Bill Wilson ended up at Town's Hospital to meet Dr. Silkworth, rather than having to go to Bellevue Hospital where most of the other New York drunks went for treatment. Dr. Strong attended the famous Rockefeller dinner on February 8, 1940 as well as being among the first trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation. He died on April 24, 1989. He and his wife Dorothy are buried 150 feet from Bill and Lois in East Dorset Cemetery in Vermont.

\* I said "allegedly" because as of this writing, I've not been able to track the source of this quote.

## AA Trivia (part 3)

by Gary N.

On page xxxi in "The Doctor's Opinion," there are the sentences: "About one year prior to the experience a man was brought in to be treated for chronic alcoholism. He had but partially recovered from a gastric hemorrhage and seemed to be a case of pathological mental deterioration." This is Hank Parkhurst, Bill Wilson's original partner in the Works Publishing Company that published the Big Book. Hank was known as a high pressure sort of a fellow that had worked for Standard Oil of New Jersey and was called the "promoter among promoters" by those that knew him back then. He was author of the First Edition Big Book story "The Unbelievers." Some say he was also the primary author of the Big Book chapter "To Employers." He relapsed on or around September of 1939, some say over a desired affair with Ruth Hock, AA's first secretary, and was never able to stay sober again for any length of time.

Hank reputedly wanted to divorce his wife and marry Ruth, but Ruth rejected him while deciding to remain Bill's secretary. Bill paid Hank \$200 for his Works Publishing Stock. It was around this time that Hank went to Cleveland to stir up trouble for Bill. Hank died after a long illness on January 18, 1954 at the age of 57. Lois Wilson ascribed his death to drinking.

Also on the same page, there are the sentences attributed to Dr. Silkworth that reads: "When I need a mental uplift, I often think of another case brought in by a physician prominent in New York. The patient had made his own diagnosis, and deciding his situation hopeless, had hidden in a deserted barn determined to die. He was rescued by a searching party, and in desperate condition, brought to me ... His alcoholic problem was so complex, and his depression so great, that we felt his only hope would be through what we then called 'moral psychology' and we doubted if even that would have any effect." This was John Henry Fitzhugh Mayo who was often simply referred to as "Honey Fitz" or just "Fitz". Fitz's sobriety date was around October of 1935 and was Bill Wilson's second or third success in helping someone getting sober. Fitz was the author of the First Edition story "Our Southern Friend," which is one of the few A.A. stories that have been in all four editions of the Big Book, though to read the story in its original form, one must read the First Edition version. (Some think the original conclusion to the story, removed in 1955 when the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition was published, to be among the finest prose of any A.A. story.) Fitz was the son of an Episcopalian minister, and while the Big Book was being written, Fitz was considered to be among the "Christian faction." The sentence in "We Agnostics" on page 56, "*Who are you to say there is no God?*" can be directly attributed to Fitz. On page 215 of a 4<sup>th</sup> Edition in Fitz's story, there are these words: "Then comes a thought that is like a voice. '*Who are you to*

*say there is no God?* It rings in my head. I can't get rid of it." Fitz moved to Washington DC and started AA meetings there. He was joined by Florence Rankin, author of "A Feminine Victory," and it was Fitz that identified her body in the morgue when she died drunk. Fitz attempted to join the Army during World War II, was diagnosed with cancer at that time, and died on October 4, 1943.

We in Atlanta are tied to Fitz, and therefore Bill Wilson, through one of Fitz's pigeons, Steve M. Steve M. is documented in Washington D.C. AA as one of "The Boys of 1939", a group comprised of Fitz and five new men that met in a group that eventually became named "The Washington Group." It was Steve M., transferred by the military, who was the man that brought A.A. to Atlanta in June of 1941 and helped found the meeting that eventually became known as the Atalan Meeting, according to the 1995 State AA publication *We Share*. The Atlanta Central Office is incorporated as the Atalan Society to this day. The meeting referred to as "The Midtown Meeting" at the Oldtimers meeting at NABA each November is this very same Atalan meeting, as matched through the past meeting address of 522 West Peachtree Street. This common thread, the address, is contained in the Anniversary printing "50 Years of NABA." Gary N.