

## **The Ultimate Big Book Study**

**by Gary N.**

Every once in a while one will hear an A.A. speaker ponder how in the world Bill Wilson ever wrote the Big Book after having as little as three and a half years of sobriety. The following paragraphs, delivered by Bill Wilson in a talk "How The Big Book Was Put Together," at Fort Worth, Texas in 1954, represent the essence of how the Big Book was created. In Bill's own words:

"It wasn't like chicken in the rough; the boys didn't eat those chapters up at all. I suddenly discovered that I was in this terrific whirlpool of arguments. I was just the umpire – I finally had to stipulate, 'Well boys, over here you got the Holly Rollers who say we need all the good old fashioned stuff in the book, and over here you tell me we've got to have a psychological book and that never cured anybody, and they didn't do very much with us in the missions, so I guess you will have to leave me just to be the umpire. I'll scribble out some roughs here and show them to you and let's get the comments in.' So we fought, bled, and died our way through one chapter after another. We sent them out to Akron and they were peddled around and there were terrific hassles about what should go in this book and what should not."

Later on in the same talk, Bill had just mentioned having written the Twelve Steps, which represented new ideas to his New York group of 'boys' that were 'assisting' him.

"Well, the next meeting comes along; I'd gone on beyond the steps to trying to amplify them in the rest of that chapter to the meeting and boy, pandemonium broke loose. 'What do you mean by changing the program . . . what about this, what about that, this thing is overloaded with God. We don't like this, you've got these guys on their knees . . . stand them up! A lot of these drunks are scared to death of being Godly . . . let's take God out of it entirely.' Such were the arguments we had. Out of that terrific hassle came the Twelve Steps. That argument caused the introduction of the phrase which has been a lifesaver to thousands . . . it was certainly none of my doing. I was on the pious side then, you see, still suffering from this big hot flash of mine. The idea of 'God as you understand Him' came out of that perfectly ferocious argument."

Thus, Bill, while being the primary "scribbler", and ultimately "the umpire," in his own words described the Big Book as being a creation substantially resulting from a group conscience type atmosphere. The

phrase that “has been a life saver to thousands” was “none of [Bill’s] doing,” which further elaborates the group nature of the creation of the Big Book.

The Big Book was professionally edited prior to its publication (A fact I’ve never heard expressed in an AA meeting or talk). As written in *Pass It On*, page 204, “Final editing of the book was done by Tom Uzzell, member of the faculty at New York University. Uzzell cut the book by at least a third (some say half – from 800 to 400 pages) and sharpened it in the process.”

Another major contribution was made to the Big Book by a non-alcoholic. Stated in *Pass It On*, also on page 204: “Dr. Howard, a psychiatrist in Montclair, New Jersey, made a vitally important contribution. He suggested that there were too many ‘you musts.’ Bill said the psychiatrist’s ‘idea was to remove all forms of coercion,’ to put our Fellowship on a ‘we ought’ basis instead of a ‘you must basis.’”

Thus, I believe it to be in the spirit of Bill Wilson to assert that our book *Alcoholics Anonymous* is clearly a creation of a group conscience atmosphere led by Bill Wilson, the umpire, who as Tradition 2 states did “not govern.” In his own words, he umpired. Through this atmosphere of Tradition 2, then, these creative meetings held in New York and Akron, the ultimate Big Book study, resulted in “a loving God” expressing “Himself in our group conscience.” Our Big Book is the result.

So, if you encounter somebody who thinks the Big Book should be changed, tell them they’re out of luck. They missed those group conscience meetings!