

**From:** [NMOlson@a...](mailto:NMOlson@a...)

**Date:** Tue Sep 17, 2002 8:19 pm

**Subject:** The Third Tradition and questions about how it came about.

Dear AA History Lovers

The following are excerpts from posts asking questions about the third tradition and from some of the responses. If your post is not mentioned and you have further information which would be of help, please send it directly to the two who need the information.

Nancy

**From:** "davidrstack" <[patchwrk@charter.net](mailto:patchwrk@charter.net)>

**Date:** Sun Sep 8, 2002 10:12 am

**Subject:** Tradition 3 and Dr. Bob

I am looking for a tape to share with my 12 and 12 study group. I am "presenting" tradition 3 on September 20th.

Tradition 3 states the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.

I heard a tape played at the Florida AA Roundup back in the mid '80s where Dr. Bob Smith (I think) talking about tradition 3. In the tape he mentioned that a fellow came to the meeting in Akron OH. He had another problem other than alcohol and afraid that he would not be accepted. He was a homosexual or if you like, gay. The outcome was that he was allowed to stay. "The group decision was "What would the Master do?" as mentioned in the 12 and 12. The 12 and 12 does not mention that the fellow was a homosexual or if you like, gay. The audio tape is very specific on this point.

Do you know where I could purchase a copy of the tape?

David S.

**From:** "Audrey Borden" <[audreyborden@earthlink.net](mailto:audreyborden@earthlink.net)>

**Date:** Tue Sep 10, 2002 2:11 pm

**Subject:** An Introduction, A Question, & An Answer

I'm conducting research on "The Man of The Third Tradition," i.e. the man with the "double stigma" who approached Dr. Bob in Akron in 1937, asking if he could join AA.

I've searched every AA publication I can find and a good deal of the related material (published outside of AA). I am quite familiar with the standard references to the topic (e.g. all Grapevine writings back to 1946, etc.). I've found a considerable amount on the Third Tradition, but very little about this man, for obvious reasons: his identity had to be protected.

Now, some 65 years later, I am trying to find out who he was. I plan to share what I learn in a book so others can learn about him, and so he may be recognized for his courage, his willingness to go to any lengths to get sober, and his contribution to the creation of our Third Tradition.

I'm searching for people who may have some recollection, or may know of some writing I'm unaware of (an unpublished letter, perhaps?) an oral account given by an old-timer who has since passed on? etc., regarding this brave man.

If anyone has any information (including hearsay, at this point!) I'd appreciate hearing from you.

David, I believe the tape you're looking for is from the 1985 International AA Convention in Montreal, Canada. The speaker was Barry L. (who's since passed away); the workshop was entitled "The Gay Origins of The Third Tradition." In it Barry plays a tape of Bill W. discussing the Third Tradition in a talk he (Bill) gave at the opening dinner of the 1968 World Service Conference in New York. A tape of Barry's presentation may be obtained from the IAC tape library (International Advisory Council of Homosexual Men & Women in Alcoholics Anonymous). IAC can be reached via their website.

Thanks for your assistance, -- Audrey B.

P.S. the incident involving the African American man with long blond hair ("Veronica" ;-)) who visited the AA Clubhouse in New York, occured in 1945; the man who approached Dr. Bob in Akron did so in 1937. So it is unlikely (though possible, until proven otherwise) that Veronica is The Man of The Third Tradition.

-- Audrey

**From: "Lash, William (Bill)" <[wlash@avaya.com](mailto:wlash@avaya.com)>**

Date: Sun Sep 8, 2002 6:10 pm

Subject: RE: [AAHistoryLovers] Tradition 3 and Dr. Bob

Dr. Bob & the Good Oldtimers says on page 240-241:

"At the same time, the earliest members began reaching out to those who might either have seemed or have felt themselves to be different. By 1939, the prevailing A.A. attitude was summed in the foreword to the Big Book, stating, 'The only requirement for membership is an honest desire to stop drinking.

"Most A.A.'s simply wanted to get people into the program, rather than keep them out. This might mean overcoming inbred prejudices and crossing social, religious, racial, and national boundaries in order to carry the message of recovery to anyone, anywhere, who needed help. It also meant doing the very same things in order to accept help. And if A.A. as a fellowship never had any greater achievement, it could say that most members have done more than pay lip service to this idea.

"As the discussion of the Third Tradition in the book "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions" shows, there was a great deal of fear about alcoholics who might be odd or different. An A.A.'s second year, a man came to an A.A. group and said he was the 'victim of another addiction even worse stigmatized than alcoholism

"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."

**From: "Arthur Sheehan" <[ArtSheehan@msn.com](mailto:ArtSheehan@msn.com)>**

Date: Tue Sep 10, 2002 12:38 am

Subject: RE: [AAHistoryLovers] Tradition 3 and Dr. Bob

In the 12&12 on Tradition Three (pages 141 - 142), Bill prefaces his story about the victim of another addiction as occurring in 1937 (On the A.A. calendar it was Year Two). The philosophy of "What would the Master do" could very well be attributed to Dr. Bob since Bill cites one of three elders who were discussing the matter. There is no reference at all to homosexuality.

The documented incident involving a homosexual occurred in 1945 at the 41st Street clubhouse in New York. It is recounted in Pass It On (317 - 318) and in the book Bill W. by Francis Hartigan (182 - 183).

Arthur

**From: "davidrstack" <[patchwrk@charter.net](mailto:patchwrk@charter.net)>**

Date: Fri Sep 13, 2002 9:09 am

Subject: Tradition 3 And Bill W.

I have written previously inquiring about information on the 3rd Tradition and Dr. Bob. I have received a tape from the 1968 open meeting of the General Service Conference where Bill W. spoke on the traditions. I was mistaken when I thought it was Dr. Bob doing the speaking and I wish to correct myself here and now.

I am also including a transcript of the portion of the talk Bill W. gave the conference regarding the beginnings of the formulation of the 3rd tradition, the Man of the Third Tradition and his sexual orientation. I have concluded that what Bill reported as "sexual deviate" means homosexual. I am not an English scholar so forgive the errors in punctuation etc....

Thank you all for your patience, your friendship and your willingness to help me find this information.

In gratitude,  
David S.

Bill W. talk  
Open meeting  
1968 General Service Conference  
Talk on all the traditions

At about year two of the Akron Group, a poor devil came to Dr. Bob in a grievous state. He could qualify as an alcoholic all right. And then he said, "Dr. Bob, I've got a real problem to tell you. I don't know if I could join AA because I am sex deviate."

Well that had to go out to the group conscious. You know. Up to then it was supposed any society could say who was going to join it. And pretty soon the group conscious began to seethe and boil and it boiled over. And under no circumstances could we have such a coward and such a disgrace among us said these gentlemen.

And you know, right then our destiny hung on a razor edge over this single case. In other words, would there be room that could exclude so called undesirability's and that caused us in that time, and for quite a time with respecting this single case, to ponder what is the more important; the reputation that we shall have. What people should think? Or is it our character.

And who are we considering our record, alcoholism is quit as unlovely. Who are we to deny a man his opportunity, any man or women.

And finally the day of resolution came. And a bunch were sitting in Dr. Bob's living room arguing what to do. Where upon dear old Bob looked around and blandly said, "Isn't it time folks to ask ourselves, 'What would the Master do in a situation like this? Would he turn this man away?'"

And that is the beginning of the AA tradition that any man who has a drinking problem is a member of AA if he says so not whether we say so. Now I think that the import on this on the common welfare has already been sustained because it takes in even more territory than the confines of our fellowship. It takes in the whole world of Alcoholics Anonymous. Their charter to freedom to join AA is assured. Indeed it was an act in general welfare.

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Your message has not been posted, please send it to the two individuals who asked the question. Thanks for your cooperation.

Nancy

**Msg # 521**

**From:** "melb" <[melb@a...](mailto:melb@a...)>

**Date:** Wed Sep 18, 2002 12:50 am

**Subject:** Re: [AAHistoryLovers] The Third Tradition and questions about how it came about.

Hi Nancy,

I don't know how to post stuff for HistoryLovers, but I would like to allude to the letter from Arthur referring to pages 317-318 in "Pass It On." I was personally responsible for this information as it came from a telephone interview I had with Barry Leach, whom I considered a fine friend. Barry was gay but we never discussed this; it was just understood and I remember seeing him in a very depressed state shortly after his longtime partner passed away. He was highly regarded at AA World Services and was the author of "Living Sober."

Barry was a very close friend of Lois Wilson and served as her escort when she would travel to other cities such as Akron to speak. I assumed that she probably had him in her will, but unfortunately he preceded her in death.

Perhaps you will consider posting this for the HistoryLovers. I also invite anybody to contact me at [melb@accesstoledo.com](mailto:melb@accesstoledo.com) or to visit my website: <http://members.accesstoledo.com/melb/>.

Thank you

Mel Barger. Toledo, Ohio

**Msg 885**

**From:** "Arthur Sheehan" <[ArtSheehan@m...](mailto:ArtSheehan@m...)>

**Date:** Wed Mar 19, 2003 10:21 pm

**Subject:** Re: [AAHistoryLovers] Fwd: Tradition Three, The man with the "problem other than alcoholism."

Hi

I was confused on parts of this last year in discussions about the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tradition. There are 3 incidents being intermingled that really have no cause/effect relationship:

1. The incident of the member who had an "addiction even worse stigmatized than alcoholism" (12&12 essay on Tradition Three) occurred at Akron, OH in 1937 ("on the AA calendar it was year two" pg 141). The "group's oldest member" and "one of the three" was Dr. Bob (Dr Bob and the Good Old-timers pgs 240-241). Last year in his search for an audiotape on the matter, David S came into possession of a tape of Bill addressing a Conference. Bill revealed that the member described his "addiction"

as "sex deviate." The presumption is that the man was a homosexual (see AAHistoryLovers message from David S re Tradition 3 And Bill W.). There is no indication he was black.

2. The 2<sup>nd</sup> incident occurred 8 years later (1945) at the 45<sup>th</sup> St Club House in NYC. Barry L (Pass It On pgs 317-318) contacted Bill W. The prospect was black, an ex-convict, had bleached blonde hair, makeup and was a "dope fiend" (there is no mention of heroin). Bill's comments set the spirit of how the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tradition should be practiced. There appears to be an element of myth around this incident. Many in AA assert that the individual went on to become one of the best 12<sup>th</sup> Steppers in NY. Pass It On says, "The prospect was invited to attend meetings, and although he soon disappeared, his presence created a precedent for the Third Tradition." His role, though dramatic, appears quite brief.

3. Dr Jim S, a black physician, spoke at the 1955 convention in Cleveland (AA Comes of Age pg 37). He resided in the Washington DC area. In Jim's Story (3<sup>rd</sup> ed Big Book pg 483-496) it cites that his main assistance came from Charlie G. (his sponsor) and Ella G., who introduced Jim to his sponsor. Jim's Story credits him with starting the 1<sup>st</sup> black group but I don't know if that is factual or not.

"The man with the other addiction," has no linkage to the black community or Dr. Jim S.

As far as "black outreach" is concerned, some in the Fellowship retrospectively (and much too idealistically) view AA as being elevated above the social problems of the times. Prejudice seems to have been as much a challenge within AA as outside it. Pass It On (pgs 315-317) speaks openly about the challenge (prior to the info you cite). On pg 316, Bill states, "In all the South and in most of the North, whites refuse to mingle with blacks socially."

Blacks predominantly had to start out with black groups or were invited to groups as "observers." Later Bill states, "As I long since learned that no man can dictate to an AA group, I tell each fellowship to abide by the wishes of the majority of its members. And if a group refuses Negroes socially, it ought to make a superhuman effort to help every single colored case to start a group of his own and permit him access to a few open meetings as an observer."

Blacks started their own groups principally due to prejudice not preference. That might raise a howl or two within AA as being inconceivable. There certainly would be exceptions but there would be no compelling reason to presume members of AA were any different from the society of which they were a part (other than with booze). I'm still uncertain on how much the racial divide has been breached. There clearly has been progress but demographics are difficult to come by other than the membership surveys. They don't seem to probe very far into the matter.

Cheers

Arthur

----- Original Message -----

**From:** [WCompWdsUnl@aol.com](mailto:WCompWdsUnl@aol.com)

**To:** [AAHistoryLovers@yahoogle.com](mailto:AAHistoryLovers@yahoogle.com)

**Sent:** Wednesday, March 19, 2003 9:51 AM

**Subject:** [AAHistoryLovers] Fwd: Tradition Three, The man with the "problem other than alcoholism."

I have discovered more history since posting this question. Please add this memo to the question. On page 315 - 318 of Pass It On, written by Bill W. as the documented history of Alcoholic's Anonymous there is more information related to the history of African Americans in Alcoholic's Anonymous. The indication, especially the last paragraph on pg. 317-318, is that Barry was doing desk duty at the club house on 41st St. The (black) man came to the door...He was an ex-convict, a vagrant, his hair was bleached blond and he had on make up; and he told us he was a dope fiend (heroin addict)...Apparently, it was Bill W. that was consulted by the group conscience, because Barry and the elders did not know what to do.

Bill W. apparently questioned, "did you say he was a drunk?" "Oh yes," Barry replied. "There's no question about that. He's certainly a drunk." "Well, I think that's all we can ask," said Bill.

Additionally, it appears from page 142 in the Twelve and Twelve that Bill W. responded, at some point, "What would the Master do?"

"The prospect was invited into the meetings." Additionally, in the Twelve and Twelve, there is the allusion, "Overjoyed, the newcomer plunged into Twelfth Step work. Tirelessly he laid AA's message before scores of people... Those scores have since multiplied themselves into thousands."

The appearance when you look at Pass It On and Tradition Three, combined, is that this gentlemen, assisted Jim, the founder of the first predominately black AA group in his work of spreading A. A. There is a reference to Jim's Story from Page 483 in the 3<sup>rd</sup>

edition of the Big Book of Alcoholic's Anonymous. On page 317 in Pass It On, "...Jim S. a physician, was called the originator of A. A.'s first black group. ("Jim's Story" appears in the second and third editions of the Big Book).

The indication is that the predominately white A. A. groups used Jim S. (who was assisted by "the man with the other addiction" to spread A. A. into the black community.

Additional understanding and historical documentation is solicited. Please post this inquiry and allow the fellowship to educate itself regarding the history of black outreach from Alcoholic's Anonymous.

Thank you for your interest as, "A A History Lovers" in all the history of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Sincerely,

Larry W.

Member of Alcoholic's Anonymous

Kansas City, Kansas/Missouri