

# WESTBORO BIG BOOK STUDY GROUP

All Saints Anglican Church

Saturday Morning 9:00 a.m.

347 Richmond Road (near Churchill)

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## The History Behind the Big Book - Forward to the Second Edition

(Tape 1 - 00:07:46.3)

J & C If we're going to study the Big Book Alcoholics Anonymous, which of course that's what we're here for this weekend, I think it would be well if we would go back and look at just a little bit of the history behind the book, be able to see what happened to some of the first people that put this thing together and by looking at that history then it's going to make it a lot easier to understand the book itself as we go through that. And what we like to do to look at some of the history is to go to the forward of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Roman Numeral XV and we'll start with the last paragraph on that page so everybody that's got your books if you're ready, Roman Numeral XV and the last paragraph on that page, Joe.

One of the things that has helped me over the years in studying Bill's writings and he does this in most all of his writings, you can follow along with what he does and it'll help you understand some of his writings. For instance he'll always tell us what the problem is, then he'll tell us the solution to that problem, and then he'll give us a practical program of action to implement the solution that he just described. He does that in most all cases of his writings so that kind of helped me, in understanding how Bill writes. So the bottom of page, on Roman Numeral page XV,

*Big Book p. xv, par. 4* "The spark that was to flare into the first A.A. group was struck at Akron, Ohio, in June 1935, during a talk between a New York stockbroker and an Akron physician."

J & C Now we now that New York City stockbroker to be this fellow named Bill Wilson. I think we're treating Bill pretty good when we call him a New York stockbroker. He really wasn't, he was a New York City stock speculator. He made his living out of selling fast-talking to slow thinking people. I don't want take anything away from Bill because he's a great man, but I think we all need to realize that he's a real alcoholic just like all the rest of us, and understanding that it'll make it easier to understand the book, because after all, Bill is the primary author of the book. The Akron physician is this fellow named Dr. Bob Smith.

*Big Book p. xv, par. 4* "Six months earlier, the broker had been relieved of his drink obsession by a sudden spiritual experience, following a meeting with an alcoholic friend who had been in contact with the Oxford Groups of that day."

J & C A little later on we're going to get into Bill's story and we're going to see in Bill's story where he had, what he always called, a vital spiritual experience in the Towns Hospital in December of 1934. Now prior to him having that spiritual experience, certain things had to take place in Bill's life. And one of the things was that this meeting with the alcoholic friend took place in the later part of November 1934 and this was a fellow named Ebby Thatcher. And Ebby Thatcher came with Bill and sat down in Bill's kitchen and he gave Bill what turned out to be two vital pieces of information. He said Bill,

people like you and I who have become absolutely powerless over alcohol,  
if we're going to have to recover from that condition, we're going to have to have the aid of a power greater than human power.

He said the doctors, and the ministers and the psychiatrists have tried to help people like us but human power doesn't seem to be able to do the job. And he said, we'll have to have the aid of a power greater than human power. And he said I've been attending meetings with a group of people called the Oxford Groupers and they told me if I could have a spiritual experience\*, that during that spiritual experience I would be able to find that power, and I would be able to recover from alcoholism. He said also they have given me a practical program of action (now the 12 Steps).

**They GUARANTEED me if I would follow that program of action:** (1) I would have the spiritual experience\*,  
(2) I would find the power and  
(3) I would be able to recover from alcoholism.

And he said, look at me Bill; it's been two months since I've had a drink. Now Bill knew about Ebby Thatcher, and he knew how Ebby drank. In fact Bill had always said, if I ever get as bad as Ebby Thatcher I'm going to quit drinking. And here's Ebby sitting in Bill's kitchen and Bill is about two thirds drunk and Ebbys been sober for two months. This made a great impression on Bill when he told him of the solution, the vital spiritual experience\*, and he told him of the practical program of action necessary to have that spiritual experience. But that isn't everything Bill had to know. Let's go a little further.

\* "... a profound alteration in his reaction to life." See Appendix II Spiritual Experience, Big Book pg. 569.

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*Big Book p. xvi, line 3* “He had also been greatly helped by the late Dr. William D. Silkworth, a New York specialist in alcoholism who is now accounted no less than a medical saint by A.A. members, and whose story of the early days of our Society appears in the next pages. From this doctor, the broker had learned the grave nature of alcoholism.”

J & C Again as we get into Bill’s story, we’ll be able to see how as far back as the summer of 1933, Bill was placed in the Towns Hospital, for withdrawal from alcohol by Dr. Silkworth. And after he had been in there a few days and his mind kind of cleared up Dr Silkworth sat down with Bill and began to explain to him his ideas about this thing concerning alcoholism. And he said Bill

I do not believe that alcoholism is a matter of willpower; I do not believe it’s a matter of moral character, and I don’t think sin has got anything to do with it.

I believe people like you are suffering from an illness, and he said it seems to be a very peculiar illness; it’s a two-fold illness an illness of the body as well as an illness of the mind.

And he said I think what has happened to people like you is

you’ve become absolutely physically allergic to alcohol.

And it seems to me as though anytime you put any alcohol whatsoever into your system,

it develops an actual physical craving which makes it virtually impossible for you to stop drinking after you have once started.

And he said because of that allergy which produces that physical craving  
you’ll never be able to safely drink alcohol again.

And he said you also have developed what we refer to as an obsession of the mind.

And he said an obsession of the mind is an idea that overcomes all other ideas to the contrary.

He said it really doesn’t make any difference how badly you want to stop drinking. From time to time

your obsession of the mind to drink will be so strong that it will overcome any ideas not to drink  
and your mind will actually lead you to believing it’s okay to take a drink.

And he said then you’ll take that drink, and then you’ll trigger that allergy and you’ll be unable to stop.

He said you can’t safely drink because of your body,

you can’t stay sober because of your mind,

therefore you’ve become absolutely powerless over alcohol.

Now Bill knew that in the summer of 1933, **BUT KNOWING THE PROBLEM DIDN’T SOLVE IT**, because shortly after that his mind told him it was okay to drink. And he took a drink, and triggered the allergy and drank for another year.

In the summer of 1934 he was placed back in the hospital again to be withdrawn from alcohol by Dr. Silkwood. And this time Dr. Silkworth pronounced him incurable, and told Bill’s wife Lois that this guy is either going to die from DT’s or he’s going to be completely insane from a wet brain and you’re going to have to lock him up or hire a bodyguard if you expect him to live. And Bill overheard that and he said this time fear sobered him for a bit. But then on Armistice Day 1934 his mind told him it was okay to drink. And he took a drink and triggered the allergy and couldn’t stop drinking. It’s ONLY AFTER Ebby came to see him and gave him the solution to that problem and gave him a program of action that Bill was able to recover. So basically he had to know three things,

- (1) **HE HAD TO KNOW THE PROBLEM** he got that from Dr. Silkwood, (p. 7, par. 2),
- (2) **HE HAD TO KNOW THE SOLUTION** (p. 12, par. 4; p. 27, par. 5),
- (3) **AND THE PROGRAM OF ACTION** that came to him from Ebby (Oxford Group) (p. xvi, par. 1-2)

THEN BILL WAS ABLE TO HAVE HIS SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE AND RECOVER FROM ALCOHOLISM.

to regain health of body and mind

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And Ebby began to take Bill to these Oxford Group meetings after that and it says,

*Big Book p. xvi, line 9* “Though he could not accept all the tenets of the Oxford Groups, he was convinced of the need for moral inventory, confession of personality defects, restitution to those harmed, helpfulness to others, and the necessity of belief in and dependence upon God.”

J & C Which were the tenets of the Oxford Group, which were later on expanded into the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

*Big Book p. xvi, line 9* “Prior to his journey to Akron, the broker had worked hard with many alcoholics on the theory that only an alcoholic could help an alcoholic, but succeeded only in keeping sober himself.”

J & C After Bill got out of the hospital that last time he began to try to help other people. He began to go out and save them up out of the gutters and take them to these Oxford Group meetings. He began to go into the bars and drag them off a bar stool and take them to the Oxford Group meetings. Most of them didn't want to go but he was taking them anyhow. He was trying to sober up the world; he had lots of enthusiasm. But after a few months of trying to do this why, nobody was staying sober but Bill. And he went to Lois and said Lois I'm trying to help these people, these alcoholics stay sober, and nobody seems to want to stay sober. And she said why don't you go talk to Dr. Silkwood and see what he has to say. So he went over to talk to Dr. Silkwood and told him the same story. And Dr. Silkwood said, yes, I've heard some of the shenanigans you're pulling out there on the streets. He said you know Bill, you're staying sober, so obviously trying to help other people is helping you stay sober. And he said, you're talking to those drunks about that great spiritual experience that you've had, and a drunk just won't accept that. He said why don't you do for them what I did for you. Why don't you

the problem

- (1) talk to them about the illness of alcoholism,
- (2) talk to them about the physical allergy, and the obsession of the mind. (two-fold illness)

Show them through your experience how that worked for you and if they will accept that, then maybe you can

- (3) talk to them about spiritual matters.

(Tape 1 - 00:18:04.3)

11 minutes