

A.A. in Santa Fe

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In 1941, Dr. Miles N. from Kansas City, Kansas, was in trouble. He had been drinking uncontrollably for over 2 years, was in the jail psychiatric unit, and the judge was considering sending him to the state mental hospital. The doctor's wife brought him the Jack Alexander article, "Alcoholics Anonymous", from the March issue of the Saturday Evening Post. The article told him 2,000 people had recovered from alcoholism through A.A., and that drunk saving is life saving for the alcoholic. Dr. N. was "struck sober". He was able to convince the judge to let him return home to help other drunks. He immediately started trolling skid row for prospects. Within a year, he opened a hospital for alcoholics in Kansas City. Over the next decades, Dr. N. sobered up 100's or 1,000's of people in the hospital or in the basement of his home. His influence, as "one of A.A.'s first doctor-members" was so great, that Bill Wilson described him as "a prodigious A.A. worker and a national authority on the chemistry of drunks" on page 95 of Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age.

Dr. N. often vacationed in Santa Fe at the La Posada de Santa Fe, which was owned by his brother and sister-in-law. One of his visits was Easter week, April 1946. But even on vacation Dr. N. couldn't get away from the suffering alcoholic. His nephew, Bob, was a lawyer who had recently opened his office in the Laughlin Building, 102 W. San Francisco, just above where Starbucks now sits. He and his partner were very concerned about the man in the office across the hall in #28. The man had been drunk for months. Bob told his uncle about the problem.

The problem was Art S., a well-connected but very drunk accountant, who was living in his office. His wife had divorced him, and he could afford nowhere else to live. Heading back to his office on New Year's Eve, he was resolved to quit drinking. He had a quart bottle of buttermilk in hand. He also had a half pint of gin in his pocket. He had forgotten about the street excavation near his office and stepped into an 18" hole at the corner of Don Gaspar and W. San Francisco, injuring his left foot. He also broke the bottle of buttermilk, cutting his chin, cheek and hands. Two teenagers helped him up the long, steep flight of stairs to his office, where Art found the gin had survived the accident. Thus ended his New Year's resolution.

A few days later, Art got Dr. Herman Renkoff, who had an office on the same floor, to patch up his cuts. But Dr. Renkoff was unable to convince Art to do something about his foot. Art was certain it was just sprained. And it was the office's busiest time of the year. For weeks, he remained in his office alone. His accounting assistant kept him supplied with beer and liquor. The usual quota was 3 pints of gin per day washed down with 12 bottles of beer plus Seconal to sleep and Dexedrine to wake up. The bellboy from the hotel down the street came by to clean up the trash. Occasionally Art sent down for chop suey from the Chinese restaurant across the street. Finally, Dr. Renkoff convinced Art to go to St. Vincent's Hospital to get his foot fixed. But Art would agree to go only after the good sisters could guarantee him a private room. He had no intention of sharing his liquor with a ward full of other men.

Surgery was required to pin his broken heel bone back together. He was put in a cast from his toes to his hip. He had brought a couple of dozen Seconals and a couple of dozen Dexedrine's with him when he entered the hospital. To his surprise, they disappeared his first night in the hospital. But his friends continued to care for him. At first his assistant would bring in a briefcase with Art's daily accountant work. After all, taxes had to be done. Naturally, the pills

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and gin were also in the briefcase. The assistant was caught and banned from visiting. Another friend, the postmaster, took up delivery duties. He was caught, and so sent his brother-in-law, who also worked at the post office. He got caught. Finally the doctors and sisters had had enough. They told Art they could do no more for him at the hospital than could be done at home and they shipped him back to his office, cast and all.

Weeks went by with the same supply arrangements as before surgery. The only bathroom available was down the hall, impossible to navigate drunk in a cast and on crutches. The only sanitary facilities were his wastebasket. Things got pretty rank. The lawyers across the hall considered calling the health department. Instead Bob talked to his uncle, Dr. N.

Art responded to a knock on his door. Dr. N. walked in and said, "Understand you're having a little trouble with alcohol." Then he told Art his own story and offered to take him back to his apartment at La Posada to get sober. At first Art still didn't trust this stranger. So he checked him out with the attorneys across the hall, who urged him to take the doctor's advice. He agreed and was carried down the same long flight of stairs and off to La Posada. Dr. N. detoxed him with the same recipe he used in Kansas City: 2 ounces of whiskey in 4 ounces of water every 3 hours for 5 doses, followed by the same every 6 hours for 3 doses, alternated with 1 teaspoon of salt in a glass of water every 3 hours between the diluted glasses of whiskey. It worked.

In the meantime, Dr. N. had somehow convinced Lenna, Art's ex-wife, to let Art move back in with her. Even though the divorce had been final since January, she let Art move into the front of the apartment. 5 or 6 months later, they were remarried. In 1948, Lenna joined A.A.

Before Dr. N. went home to Kansas City a few days after Easter, he told Art, "You are sober now. You will never need another drink the rest of your life. If you want to stay sober, you must get into A.A. and work at it, and I really mean work at it!" Dr. N. became Art's first sponsor.

Nephew Bob suggested Art get a copy of the Big Book. Art promptly wrote to New York, asking for one to be sent C.O.D. About a week or so later, he was paid a visit from Bill B., Sr. Bill had also been in touch with New York, inquiring how he, his son, Bill Jr. and a waitress from La Fonda could start a meeting in Santa Fe. Somehow word about Art had gotten to Bill. So, the Santa Fe Group of Alcoholics Anonymous, now known as the Downtown Group, started with these four in the spring of 1946.

The Santa Fe Group grew rapidly from its first 4 members in 1946 to an average of 30 attending open meetings. Early on, they met at Jack, "the radioman" 's place. However, Jack soon fell behind in rent, and the Group had to move to the basement of the public library. In August 1947, at an open meeting in the library basement, 117 were present. Next they tried the Diggle Photo Shop on College Street, now Old Santa Fe Trail, at perhaps No. 415. Dissatisfied with these arrangements, they moved in 1948 or 1949 to a 5-room residence on East DeVargas, between College and what is now Paseo de Peralta. They called it their clubhouse. The next move was in 1952 to much larger quarters in the Ruth Laughlin Alexander house at 116 East DeVargas. They shared that building with the New Mexico Commission on Alcoholism, leading to some controversy in the community regarding the Traditions. So they moved again to Montezuma just west of Cerrillos in 1958 or 1959. Even without the Traditions controversy, the

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Group would have had move again anyway, because the Alexander house was torn down in 1963 to make way for new state office buildings and parking lots. By the mid-60's, the Group met at the American Association Of University Women on Johnson Street. In the early '80's, they were meeting at the Church of Holy Faith. From there, the Group moved to the First Presbyterian Church, then St. Bede's, then the Santuario de Guadalupe School, and finally to the Westminster Presbyterian Church where it presently meets.

As soon as it formed, the Group became very active in twelve-step work. Numerous drunks were detoxed, using the Dr. N.'s method, at the various clubhouses. While using the Alexander house, the Group had 4 beds available for in-house detoxification. The Group helped start other groups in Española, Las Vegas, Raton and Taos. Already in 1946, at Group expense and at a financial loss, they published a Spanish translation of a booklet from the A.A.'s in Salt Lake City, "Who, me?" A member, Antonio J. M., the Editor of the Spanish edition of the local newspaper, the Santa Fe New Mexican, was the translator. The booklet went on to be distributed in the thousands, at 10¢'s a copy, mainly to Los Angeles and Southern California. It also got to Central and South America, where, incidentally, it received some criticism for the use of colloquial New Mexican Spanish. Art, in particular, tried to spread the word to Spanish speakers, and had an extensive correspondence with Joe A. of Mexico and Los Angeles. It was mainly through his connection with Joe that the translation of "Who, me?" spread throughout Southern California. Joe, hosted by the Santa Fe Group, visited Santa Fe and other parts of New Mexico to share with English and Spanish speaking A.A.'s and help raise interest in establishing Spanish-speaking groups.

In 1947, with the cooperation of the warden of the state penitentiary, the Group began to take meetings into the pen. Soon, a new inmate group formed, called the Sundial Group, which for some time proudly called itself the first such group in A.A.. By February 1948, the Sundial Group had about 20-30 English-speaking and 20 Spanish-speaking members.

Also in 1947, Art—remember he was well connected—and other New Mexico A.A. members successfully lobbied the state legislature to form and fund the New Mexico Commission on Alcoholism. The Commission consisted of five members, two of whom were physicians. At least two of the other three members were to be "alcoholics who shall be successfully recovered for two or more years prior to appointment". The Commission was charged with the obligation of studying the problem of alcoholism, including methods and facilities available for the care, custody and treatment of "persons addicted to the intemperate use of spirits or intoxicating liquids". The courts were empowered to acknowledge alcoholics as sick persons in need of proper care, and were also empowered to commit alcoholics to the joint custody and control of the Commission and the committing judge. New Mexico was among the first 10 states in the Union to adopt such governmental activity.

In 1949, the governor named to the Commission the doctor Dr Renkoff; Robert D., an A.A. member from Clovis; Merwyn A. of Albuquerque, also sobered up by Dr. N.; Dr. Rudolph Kieve of Clovis; and Thomas Baird of Deming. The Executive Director of the Commission was also a recovered alcoholic position, and Art was got the job. The address for the Commission, until it moved to the Alexander house, was Art's office in the Laughlin Building. In his new position, Art became even more active with public relations for A.A. He, other A.A.'s, and Commission members frequently presented educational panels on local and Albuquerque radio

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stations. The Commission was able to get additional funding from the legislature, in the form of a tax on liquor—in cooperation with the liquor lobby. This funding led to the opening of the Turquoise Lodge in Albuquerque on September 4, 1952. Next came the Yucca Lodge in Silver City, which later transferred to Roswell where on August 1, 1954, it became the Pecos Valley Lodge. In the early '60's, the patient charge at the Lodges was \$126 for New Mexico residents and \$220 for non-residents for a 14 day stay. In 1970, the charges went up to \$176 and 375.90 respectively. With the availability of Turquoise Lodge, the Santa Fe Group was able to lessen its detoxing load at the clubhouse to the less serious cases only.

Although the Commission had a director and at least 2 members who were "recovered alcoholics, and did its work in accordance with A.A. principles, it was still a governmental body and not A.A. As an appointed commission, personnel changed with each changing administration, and the old "recovered alcoholics" were tossed out as the new governor and new "recovered alcoholics" came in. Naturally, this led to some resentments within the A.A. community.

Dr. Renkoff actively cooperated with the Santa Fe Group from the beginning. In 1948, he opened a small private hospital in Santa Fe for alcoholism treatment. It was soon full, but it didn't last long. At an average loss of \$600 per month, it went under.

Until the mid-60's, the 2 meetings a week of the Santa Fe Group were the only show in town. Then, in an apparent personality struggle, the Tesuque Group was formed by George R., Bill C., and Alfonso M. It met in Slim Green's tack/saddle shop in Tesuque on Thursday and Saturday at 8PM. The shop may have been where the Tesuque Post Office now sits or in another structure behind El Nido. For a while, there were some hard feelings between the two Groups and few members of either Group attended the other Group's meetings. The Santa Fe Group not too kindly referred to the Tesuque Group as the Country Club. After a few years, the rent at Slim's shop rose, forcing the Tesuque Group moved into town to the Christ Lutheran Church. Eventually it moved to St. John's Methodist Church where it meets today.

Still, by the late '60's, there were only 4 formal meetings a week in the city of Santa Fe. At the time, the Santa Fe Group's format consisted mainly of sharing and discussion, while the Tesuque Group stressed A.A. history and Step and Tradition Study. A quote often heard at the time was "If you want to get sober, go to the Santa Fe Group. If you want to learn about A.A., go to the Tesuque Group". In 1969, in a meeting schedule distributed by the Española Group, there were eight meetings listed for the greater Santa Fe area, all at 8PM except for an informal discussion meeting held on Sunday at 4PM at various members' homes: Monday—Los Alamos Group, Tuesday—Santa Fe Group, Wednesday—Española Group, Thursday—Tesuque Group, Friday—Santa Fe Group, and Saturday—both the Tesuque Group and Los Alamos Group. This schedule was firm for many years, and it was common for members of the various groups to travel to each other's meetings. Particularly popular was a Wednesday evening event, when A.A.'s would gather at Smokey S.'s restaurant, La Mesita in Pojoaque, before attending the Española Group's meeting.

In 1975 or 1976, John W. and other members of the Tesuque Group felt the need for a new group focusing on gratitude and positive spiritual experiences. Another impetus was the desire to find

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a stable meeting location. The Santa Fe and Tesuque Groups had recently been forced to move from one church meeting place to another. So they started the Serenity Group, which met and still meets at the Church of Holy Faith. Later, the Rebos Group spun off from the Serenity Group.

The 1980's saw the rapid development of many new groups in Santa Fe. A men's group and a women's group had formed by 1981. In 1981 or 1982, Herb L., Amber, Priscilla and Elsie thought it was time for gay and lesbian meetings. The women missed similar meetings they had attended back home in Texas. The new Mariposa Group originally met in member's homes but soon moved to the Friendship Club on Tuesday nights at 6PM. Its name has since changed to Live and Let Live. It has spun off the Gay, Sober and Proud Group, and later the Lambda Study Group and the Lesbians Living Sober Group.

By the mid '70's, there had been enough growth in northern New Mexico that District 2, which included Santa Fe, Los Alamos and Taos, had become too big. At the September 1978 Area Assembly, it was agreed to split off the northern part of District 2 and form District 14 around Taos. By the '80's, another similar change became necessary. A meeting held in Tesuque in October 1983 led to an election which split off District 15, including Los Alamos, Española and Pojoaque.

Before the '80's, all meetings permitted smoking. Apparently there was one nonsmoking meeting when Art L. came into the program in 1983, but it appears to have faded away. Art, Carol and Phoebe thought there should be a nonsmoking group and founded Lungsavers in 1985 or 1986. The first Lungsaver meetings were held in the Girls' Club above Paseo de Peralta. It soon outgrew that space and moved to the First Presbyterian Church. In addition to the larger accommodations, the church also had space for children, and Lungsavers became the first meeting to provide childcare in Santa Fe.

David S. came into the rooms in 1985. In January 1986, David's sponsor, Ray S., and Reuben G. went to hear Dr. Paul O. speak in Albuquerque. Dr. Paul's comments about the importance to his sobriety of an early morning meeting impressed Ray and Reuben, and the next day, Ray, Reuben and David started the Early Birds Group. Early Birds has since become Early Birds/Sunrisers and has spun off Saturday Morning Sober and Early Birds Sunday Morning.

In 1986, after a stormy year in and out of the program in Florida, Scott T. got sober and moved to Santa Fe with his friend and mentor, Theresa. Still in his early 20's, Scott had been involved in young peoples' A.A. in Florida. Finding no such activity in Santa Fe, he and a friend, Bill, started the Young Peoples' Group here. The Group first met in Bill or Scott's apartments but outgrew these small spaces rapidly. Scott remembers times when his apartment was packed with kids overflowing outside into the snow. The Group, after some initial hurdles, eventually moved to the old Friendship Club on Alta Vista.

Since the '80's, as the need arose, other new groups have formed while some of the older groups have gone away. The Rebos Group left us in 2005. Keep It Simple and Join the Tribe both formed in 1988. The Old Friends Group, which meets at Santuario de Guadalupe, got going in 1999. Not Saints Men's Group started in 1990, and the Longtable Group in 1995. An A.A.

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Group formed in 2000. The Jaywalkers Group came to be in 2002. Both of the latter groups meet at the Salvation Army. The Madrid Group started in _____. The Eldorado Group formed as one meeting in _____ and has since grown to 6 meetings a week. The Pecos Group started in _____.

FRIENDSHIP CLUB

Although A.A. in Albuquerque grew up around its clubs—the Isleta Club, the Desert Club, and the Heights Club—Santa Fe, perhaps due to lingering resentments from the Santa Fe Group's experiences at the Alexander house and during the Commission days, appears to have resisted the creation of a club and continued to hold meetings in churches. However, church based meetings also had problems, such as reluctance of some church members to host recovering alcoholics, smoking residue, and trash. This lead to meetings often having to move location. In 1978, for instance, the Tesuque Group lost its home at St. Bede's. This event stimulated Barbara B. and others to organize the Friendship Club as a nonprofit corporation. Gilbert L. was the first president, followed by Jack F. The Club was initially next to the Turf Club on the Old Albuquerque Highway in an old, cold building with high utility costs. After one winter, the Club moved to West San Francisco Street. But, after about 2 years, problems with parking and rent lead to a temporary move to Baca Street. A third move landed the Club on Alta Vista Street at the corner of Cerrillos where it stayed until 1990. The Alta Vista location is remembered by many for its green shag and greasy orange carpets with some mixed emotions. With the rapid growth of groups in the 80's and more rent problems, the Club again outgrew its home, and moved to its present location on Rosina Street. With the added space, there was room for more meetings. Both the Road Runners Group, noon seven days a week, and the Happy Hour Group, 6PM Monday through Friday, started soon after the move to Rosina.

CENTRAL OFFICE

For many years there was no Central Office/Intergroup Office in Santa Fe. In the beginning, Art S. answered the calls in his office. In 1969, Bob L.'s first sponsor, Steve, was answering the A.A. calls on his home phone. When Bruce I. called the A.A. number listed in the phone book in 1972, an answering service staffed by "Old Helen" sent a twelve step caller named Bert K. In the late '70's and early '80's, among the numerous counter culture groups then in Santa Fe was a collective, The Pig Farm. Among the ways The Pig Farm supported itself was providing an answering service to various worthy organizations, including Alcoholics Anonymous.

By 1987, the community saw the need for a Central Office. A committee, composed of Tom U., George (G.T.) K., Sonya, and Don E., and others, went to Albuquerque to consult with Julia C., the long time coordinator for the Albuquerque Central Office. The first Santa Fe Central Office was opened in the radio building on Marcy Street where the rent was about \$200 per month. The office was incorporated as a nonprofit organization on August 18, 1989.

Shortly after the Friendship Club moved to its Rosina Street location in 1990, Central Office moved into another suite in the same building, that part of the building now adjacent to the Paper Tiger. However, having the Club and Central Office in the same building lead to confusion in the community regarding the relationship between the two. It was finally decided that Central Office had to physically separate its location from the Friendship Club. In 1996 or 1997, it moved next to a barbershop on the corner of St. Francis and Camino Sierra Vista, where it stayed for several years before moving to 1942 1/2 Cerrillos Road. Problems with the rent—a seemingly ever recurring problem with groups, clubs and central offices—necessitated another

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move in 2006 to its current location at 505 Camino de Los Marquez in the Religious Science Center.

SUMMARY

Since its beginnings in April 1946, A.A. in Santa Fe has grown in spurts. The '40's and '50's saw the spread of meetings to other parts of northern New Mexico. Early on, twelve-stepping took off. Meetings were brought to the state penitentiary. The New Mexico Commission on Alcoholism was formed. Translation and distribution of literature to Spanish-speakers was performed. Another growth period was the late '70's and '80's, when the Friendship Club, Central Office and numerous new groups were formed. Over the years, changes have occurred. Most sources for this history have seen changes in twelve-step work, sponsorship, the format of meetings, and the content of meetings. Discussion in the meetings reflected the times when they were happening. There were periods of concern with addiction to substances other than alcohol.

Sometimes feminist issues were more prominent. At other times treatment centers had more influence. Codependency was once a popular topic. And as with individual A.A. members, problems came and went for the groups, Central Office and the Club. Occasionally there would be worries about this or that facility or group surviving. But as with Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole, Santa Fe A.A. has continued to grow and prosper and maintain its primary purpose: "to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This history was compiled by Jim L., District 2, Area 46 Archivist, based on a similar history written by Dennis M. in 1992 for a fund raising event which never occurred. Copies of that

document are in the District 2 Archives. Dennis also aided in the editing of the current history. It could not have been written without the material provided from documents and tapes from the early players such as Art S., and Dr. N., materials from the Area 46 Archives in Albuquerque, the work of the previous District 2 Archivist, Tommy A., and help and materials provided by or interviews with current or formers members of the Santa Fe A.A. community—Alfonso T., Art L., Bob L., Bruce I., David L., David S., George B., Herb L., Juliet M., Kevin K., Sally Y., Samantha D., Scott T., and Tom U. This history is incomplete and will hopefully be expanded as more data comes to light and more interviews are performed.

Jim Lipsett
August 2006