

FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ABA
29 AUG 2008 OPENING ADDRESS
"ABA Then and Now: The First Fifteen Years"
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INTRODUCTION

Good Morning! Welcome to everyone, and particularly to any newcomers to ABA, to any who are newly sober and suffering the pain of withdrawal symptoms, and to all family members who are accompanying their loved ones in their walk of recovery. It is a great privilege to be here at this historic event, to look around this room today and behold what our collective Higher Power is doing in, with, and through ABA in his or her work of healing anorexics and bulimics all over the planet. The rate of ABA's growth and the miracles I witness in you, my fellow ABA members, provide definitive proof for me that God's power is behind us all.

The purpose of this weekend is first and foremost for ABA members from all over the world to come together, to meet one another, to connect, to forge new friendships and strengthen existing ones, to find new channels of support for ourselves and fresh opportunities to serve one another. It is in the connection with one another that healing begins, and continues, as we each wend our way along our recovery path. It is through connection with one another that we encounter the love that heals us. It is love, and love alone, that has power to heal. Many of us call our Higher Power just that: Love. And we need that love to come in the form of flesh and blood, for we are all flesh and blood. As I look at all of you, I see God-in-skin present here. You are channels of God's power for me, and I pray that I may be that for you.

The second purpose in holding this Conference is to celebrate ABA's 15th birthday. Celebration is one of the essential aspects of human life on this planet, in all cultures and all periods of history. Without celebration there is danger that we will take the mystery and miracle of life for granted, become jaded and immune to surprise and laughter and delight and joy. Occasions of celebration—whether birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, graduations, funerals, special family dinners—all afford opportunity for people to reflect on what is important in their lives, to stop moving for a while and to step back and look at the bigger picture of what their lives are becoming in the context of their relationships with others, at what they are becoming as they walk the journey we all share, from birth to death. This weekend we can all do that as we reflect on what ABA is for us, what it has been for us, and what our future in ABA may be.

Our Conference theme is "United in Sobriety: A World of Experience" and we have a lineup of speakers from Groups around the world, all of whom I am eager to hear—as I'm sure you are as well. My job is to set the tone for the celebration that this weekend is by reviewing the first fifteen years of our history as a Fellowship. By no design of my own, I am the only person in this room today who has been with the Fellowship since its birth on 18 Feb 93. This places me in the unique position of being able to speak from first-hand experience on the entirety of our history. I am delighted to share my reflections with you—and, I ask you to bear in mind that they are *mine*, colored by my memories, my ideals.

my at-times distorted perceptions, the worldview out of which I operate, and so forth. Had Mary Beth been able to be with us today to give this address, it would no doubt be entirely different. So I ask you to hold before you the inescapable subjectivity of my message as you listen to it.

THE SOUL OF ABA

Over the past two months, as I pondered how to approach my subject: "ABA Then and Now: The First 15 Years", what came to me were two words: "Soul" and "Story." I have thus decided to reflect on the soul of ABA, and to relate the fifteen-year story of that soul.

Those of you who know me well know that I have a passion for language, for words, and can be just a little obsessive about their correct usage! Every thing, every concept and every created being has a name, and I like to call everything and everyone by their correct name. This need, to name things correctly, is encrypted in my DNA.

So let's look first at the meaning of these two words. "Soul" is a fascinating word with multiple meanings, but the one I am using today is "the immaterial essence of a material being" or, more simply, "that which makes something itself." Aristotle, for example wrote that "what makes an axe an axe is the soul of the axe." Extrapolating, what makes ABA ABA is the soul of ABA. Every living soul is unique, different, distinct from every other soul in the universe. Even identical twins each have distinctive, individual souls. And since ABA is alive today, it too has a soul that is unique and distinct from every other living entity in the universe, including every other 12-Step Fellowship. ABA is itself, is what it is, because of its soul. ("Soul" is not synonymous with "spirit," by the way, and I'll come back to that point later.)

So I want to focus on the soul of ABA. Each of us as ABA members, past and present, has our own unique human soul, of course, and we bring our souls together to contribute to the soul of ABA. Nevertheless, I believe the soul of ABA as a collective Fellowship is not merely the sum of its parts. ABA as a whole is bigger, deeper, richer than all of us put together. Perhaps many of you can relate to that—at an ABA meeting do you experience something stirred up within you that is more than you can explain by the simple presence of the particular individuals who are in the room? If you know what I mean by this, then you know what it is to be in touch with the *soul* of ABA.

The second word I want to look at today is related to soul, and that is the idea of "story." Story is defined as "a narrative account of real or imaginary events." Yet we all recognize that there is more to a good story than a simple recitation of facts. There is a mysterious essence at the heart of a story that moves something in us beyond reason and intellect. The Greek word for story is *logos*, which can also be translated as "word." My personal story, my *logos*, is much more than a collection of facts about my life. My story is the mystery of my essence as a unique person in this life, it is as unique as my fingerprints, and it may be the greatest gift given to me by Life and in turn bestowed by me on life, on the lives of others. The same is true for every other person in this room, and for ABA

itself. We each have our story, and our story is unique, and it is ours alone. Furthermore, as long as we live, our story is ever unfolding, ever evolving, and ever true.

To unite these two words, "soul" and "story." I will quote Thomas Moore, the author of *Care of the Soul*. He wrote: "The infinite inner space of a story. ..is its soul." ABA has its story, and in the infinite space at the center of that story we will find revealed the soul of ABA.

You may be thinking right now. "Who cares? Why is she going on about such abstract philosophical concepts? How long am I going to have to sit here? Why doesn't she just tell us ABA's history and get it over with?" Because to fully appreciate ABA and her history, we need to look not just at the simple facts of her story, but at the deeper meanings behind the facts, at ABA's soul both hidden and revealed at the center of her story, and at the mysterious movements of the loving Power who brought ABA to birth and continues to grow us up today as a collective entity. So please be patient with me as I finish laying the groundwork for that process.

Let me say just one more apparently irrelevant thing before I plunge into a factual account of our history. The Greek physician Herakleitos said about 3000 years ago that. "You can never discover the limits of the soul, no matter how many roads you take, so deep is its *logos*." In other words, ABA's *logos*, her story, is so deep that that we will never discover the limits of her soul, no matter how many ways we look at her or talk about her. This says to me that the soul of ABA dwells at every moment in the centre of the Infinite, of the Divine, of the limitless and eternal Power who created her. So, if I do my job right today, you will leave here with more questions than answers, more awe and wonder than information, more sense of mystery than of revelation!

I'd now like to tell you the history of ABA's soul chronologically, beginning with her birth, her infancy and toddler period—the first two years of her life, her early childhood up to the age often, and her pubescence and adolescence—the past five years. Then I want to talk about *now*, about the part we play as ABA members in the care of ABA's soul today, looking at some of the challenges we currently face in our role as caretakers of ABA's soul.

As I proceed with this presentation, I will be drawing some parallels between ABA and Alcoholics Anonymous. I do this because, although ABA is a much smaller Fellowship than A A, the similarities in our origin and early development are striking, even down to the fact that AA had developed sufficiently by 1950 that it was ready to hold its First International Convention, in Cleveland Ohio. It was fifteen years old. just like us! None of us in ABA planned that coincidence, by the way. It's simply something to notice.

(1) THE BIRTH OF ABA'S SOUL--WHAT CAME BEFORE

Let's start, then, with the birth of ABA's soul. Every soul must be born, and for that it requires parents. ABA had three parents: Mary Beth M, Monica P. and me. To get some sense of the soul's story, one must look at the antecedent stories of its parents. I can tell you my story, but not those of the other two. They would need to be here to speak for

themselves, and that is not possible. All I can give you of their stories is my perspective on them, and that I will do. I spoke with Mary Beth a few weeks ago. from her home in New Brunswick. She longs to be with us this weekend, and circumstances have made that impossible. She has, however, given me permission to share all the details about her that you will shortly hear.

My story is in the ABA book, and most of you have probably read it. so I will only encapsulate it here. What I would like to share in depth with you is not found in the book. If you've read my story, you know that I developed anorexia forty years ago, in 1968, at the age of nineteen, and that I bottomed out in 1983. in my mid-thirties. At that point, instead of committing suicide I cried out for help to an unknown God, and my prayer was answered, after two months in the deepest darkness of my life, through the people who showed up in my life and offered me meal support. I was able to accept their offer, for the simple reason that life in my thin body had ceased to have any value, indeed had become unlivable. so I was willing to gain weight if that's what was needed to recover—and I knew that it was. Once sober, I was able, by the pure gift of God. to move intuitively through the 12 Steps-without a Fellowship, without literature to guide me. without a sponsor—and four hours later, at Step 7, was restored to sane thinking about my body and about food.

The deadly obsession was cast from my mind in an instant, just as Bill W's deadly obsession with alcohol was cast from his in Dec 1934. I knew, as he knew, that this was a miracle, the work of a Power greater than myself, and I knew, as he knew, that I needed to share the good news—that healing is possible if we tap into a Power Greater than ourselves—with others suffering from anorexia. I knew nothing of the 12 Steps until I stumbled across them in Al-Anon nine years later. Nor did he. for they were not conceptualized and written down until 1939, in Bill's fifth year of sobriety. Instead, we *lived* the Steps, or they lived us, depending on which way you look at it. Their orderly progression and movement in us emerged out of the dark mystery at the center of our beings, out of our souls, guided by the Higher Power who resided there and could finally get *to* us, because we were sober.

Bill's earliest attempts at Step 12 ("carrying the message") were stunningly unsuccessful, as were mine, because neither of us could identify the exact *process* by which we had obtained our miraculous release from the mental prison that had held us captive for decades. For six months Bill pushed his way into bars and hospitals and forced drunks to listen to him expound on how they needed to have an experience of God in order to sober up. Not surprisingly, they all poured themselves another drink. I flew out to Vancouver, to Shaughnessy Hospital, to locate a young anorexic patient whom I had referred to a psychiatrist some years before. I went for a walk with her and preached to her about how God would deliver her from her obsession as he had delivered me, if she would just ask him to do that. Not surprisingly, she kept eating lettuce and running five miles a day as soon as she got out of hospital.

It is here that our stories part company. Bill W had the good fortune to be overheard one day in his fruitless 12th Step work by Dr Silkworm, one of AA's guardian angels. He told

Bill to quit preaching at the drunks he was trying to reach, and instead to focus on giving them information about what their exact problem was—*powerlessness of mind and body*—and only then, when they were convinced (Step 1), to introduce the spiritual solution to this problem—a Higher Power. The result of Dr Silkworth's intervention was the historic meeting between Bill and Dr Bob in May 1935. and AA was born.

My story is different. After three months living free of my anorexic obsession—without meetings or literature or knowledge of the 12 steps or sponsor or another human being to walk with—I met, not Dr Silkworth, but a man. At 3 months sober the bottom of my iceberg was still relatively intact, and I leapt into other addictions in June 1983, and stayed there for more than a decade. Alcohol, addiction to a relationship, workaholism, compulsive caretaking, and so forth. I remained very sick, and I relapsed into anorexia too—"little vestiges of control to avoid that most fearsome state, getting fat"—almost as soon as I started drinking. Because my behaviors didn't appear as bizarre as they had in the earlier years of my anorexia, and because I didn't lose any weight. I could remain in denial about the reality of my relapse.

Fast forward to 1992. nine years later. I was now 43 years old, married, had three young sons and a very busy family medical practice, and had just finished writing the first draft of a book-length manuscript—my autobiography, the story of my recovery from anorexia--because, you see, I thought I *was* fully recovered. That's how deep my denial went. God, of course, knew I wasn't recovered and ensured I did not find a publisher for this book, despite all my best efforts for nearly a year.

In April of 1992 I was seeing a psychiatrist, still trying to fix myself, and one issue that came up was the number of alcoholics in my life, past and present. (I had no idea at that time that I too am an alcoholic.) The good doctor suggested I attend Al-Anon. and there I discovered the 12-Step Program. I immediately saw these Steps as naming the exact path I'd followed nine years before when I arrived at my release from AN. I feverishly wrote an addendum to my book, showing how I had in fact followed the 12 Steps to attain freedom from AN, and continued searching for a publisher. With this new information added, in Oct 1992 a publisher appeared who wanted to turn my manuscript into a book.

Meanwhile, in May 1992 I was asked to speak at an ED conference in southern Alberta, sharing my anorexic story publicly for the first time, and I did so. incorporating information on the 12 Steps as the pathway that I had actually followed. In the audience was a gastroenterologist who phoned me three days later to ask me to see one of his patients, a hopeless anorexic whom he was keeping alive with IV feedings.

I had not worked with anyone suffering from an eating disorder after that earliest disastrous attempt to do so back in 1983 when I first sobered up. When that first woman failed to recover. I realized I was missing something vital, but I didn't know what it was. I never tried again, and simply went on referring all ED patients to a psychiatrist.

So it was a tremendous leap of faith, given to me by the grace of God, that allowed me to say "Yes" to this gastroenterologist and begin working with his young patient. I poured

my heart and soul into the work, yet even though I now knew about the 12 Steps as a pathway to recover}', I still lacked basic knowledge of the *disease* itself—what is the drug? What is sobriety? Step 0 stuff. I was still in the same boat as Bill W in his earliest attempts to carry the message to others. I was in *almost* the same place I'd been at in 1983 when I first tried working with another anorexic. Most significantly. I was still trying to do this all on my own. with God to give me a little help now and then. I still had no other recovering anorexics and bulimics to walk with. Not surprisingly. I was as completely unsuccessful in 1992 as I had been in 1983. Jennifer did not recover. I fell flat on my face with workaholism and codependency, yet I did stay sober in anorexia. And I did continue to take ED patients into my practice. I was now sure *someone* would eventually get well.

However, another unforeseen gift emerged from the presentation I gave at that conference. Also in the audience was a patient of mine—a woman whose family physician I had been for some time. This was Mary Beth M, a woman six years my senior, an alcoholic nun who was three years sober in Alcoholics Anonymous and working through the 12 Steps with an AA sponsor. We gave her a ride back to Edmonton, and during that three-hour journey we forged a deep personal relationship. For the first time, she disclosed her chronic bulimia to me and shared about her futile attempts at recovery, feeling free to do that because she had now heard the details of my anorexic story. One anorexic or bulimic talking with another, sharing experience, strength, and hope, opens doors in us that nothing else can.

ABA was not yet born, but two of her founders connected for the first time that day. Although neither of us yet knew it, the Great Mystery had conceived ABA's soul in the two of us through that meeting. I continued to see Mary Beth as a patient, and she continued to struggle to find sobriety in her eating and laxative abuse over the next nine months. Although this work took place in my office, with me as the professional and her as the patient, still we continued to share on this new plane—one anorexic/bulimic talking with another—and on a deeply intimate level. The gestation of ABA was proceeding in both of us—far beyond our knowing—over those nine months. One more element would be required before ABA's birth could occur.

Early in January 1993 I hospitalized a young anorexic/bulimic woman. Monica P. for treatment of her critical physical condition. I visited her daily and supported her to eat soberly. We talked about the spiritual solution, to which she was open. In February she was ready for discharge. We both knew it was vitally important that she continue to eat in a healthy manner and to not binge and purge. I called Mary Beth and asked her if she would help in this process. She readily agreed, and the three of us met for lunch at a restaurant—Mr John's on 124th Street—on Wednesday, 18 Feb 1993. There, the soul of ABA was born. No longer was I a professional working with two patients. We were now completely equals, sisters in recovery, three anorexics and bulimics there to support one another to eat soberly and to talk about the issues in our lives that impinged on our recovery.

This equality, which lies at the heart of all 12-Step recovery, was the final element needed to give birth to ABA's soul. Rabia Elizabeth Roberta, a peace worker and

women's advocate, expresses this concept in a recent essay: "Service is a relationship between equals and it heals us as well as others.... We serve life not because it is broken but because it is holy. We learn that our humanity is more powerful than our expertise alone." ("Showing Up: Notes on Action in the World." *Desert Call*. Winter 2007:4-7)

(2) INFANCY AND TODDLERHOOD: 1993-1995 (Age 0 to 2)

Thus began the infancy of the soul of Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous. The fellowship we found that day, together with the strength and joy that flowed to each of us from that meeting, led us to begin gathering weekly for ongoing support. At first we continued meeting for Wednesday lunch at Mr John's, but after a few weeks we moved the venue to Mary Beth's living room and, later still, changed the time to 4 p.m. to make it more convenient for more people. By this point we had invited others to join us and the meeting was growing rapidly. Soon we composed a membership list with phone numbers to enable us to stay in touch between meetings.

We as yet had no name for our little group. We talked about what to call ourselves. We knew⁷ that our eating disorders qualified us for the label of insanity and that the road we were taking to recovery (approaching our disease as an addiction and using the 12-Step Program) placed us outside mainstream psychiatry and medicine, on the fringes of eating disorder treatment. Based on these two facts, someone suggested we call ourselves "The Lunatic Fringe." The name stuck.

You may not know^f that AA also had no name during its first four years. Because they were meeting with the Oxford Group, a frankly Christian organization that provided them with spiritual direction, they were commonly referred to as "The Drunk Squad of the Oxford Group". It was only after their textbook was published in April 1939 that their little Fellowship began to be called by the same name as their book.

On the background of these early days. I was still a blind woman, fumbling around in the dark, not knowing what my problem really was. The bottom of my iceberg continued to haunt me, yet the Fringe was ministering to me just as much as it was to others. I discovered the value in regular meetings. I drank deeply from the rootedness of the Fringe, I found God at work in my life in a new way. Mary Beth and I were soulmates, and we reveled in times of deep connection. Together we traveled to Montana in July of 1993 to participate in a healing workshop for people in recovery. We roomed together for a week, prayed together, laughed and cried together, soaked in the hot springs together, and I shared with her more deeply than I had ever shared with another human being. We ate soberly together on that trip, of course, and Mary Beth's bowel function miraculously returned to normal after decades of laxative abuse. After our return to Edmonton, our deep friendship continued, and we loved each other through difficult times as Mary Beth dove deep into healing from her childhood sexual abuse and I endured the pain of end-stage workaholicism and a slowly disintegrating marriage.

In the summer of 1994 my spiritual and emotional suffering reached a level that was finally intolerable, and I knew I would have to die if I couldn't recover from whatever it was that was ailing me. I got on my knees and begged God to show me the truth. A

month later I found myself in my first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, so desperate that I was able to surrender to working with a no-nonsense sponsor and the discipline of the 12 Steps. My recovery moved to a new level, and I began to actually get well. The bottom of my iceberg really started to melt.

Once Mary Beth and I were both sober in AA and working with sponsors, the Fringe underwent radical shifts as well. In the late summer of 1994 we officially adopted an adaptation of the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, including our unique First Step that is still used today. The entire group sat together in Mary Bern's kitchen one evening after a meeting, ate pizza for dinner, and hammered out the first section of the "Preamble For Meetings" which, with a few minor changes, is still used today. How God was at work in us, embracing and feeding the toddler soul of ABA! I can still see us in my mind's eye. our early Fellowship: people like Barb E, Marie S, Michelle W, Pat K, Denise C, Carola A, Barb A, Lesley W. Clare M. Few of these women remain with us today, yet they were our early pioneers, and the love we shared was the pure gift from God that nourished us all. That mutual love became the foundation for this Fellowship.

Mary Beth moved within Edmonton several times over the next three years, and the group followed her wherever she went. Her warm hospitality, her consistently welcoming acceptance of all who stumbled through her door, her strong yet gentle presence, her willingness to be authentic and vulnerable—made her someone whom others instinctively loved, and loved to be with. She was a soft resting place for any beleaguered or battered person who wished to show up. Mary Beth was herself the early embodiment of the soul of the Fellowship. Going the extra mile, she even opened her home to women like Marie S and Barb A who needed a safe place to live in early recovery, a place where they could learn to eat in a healthy fashion after years of self-abuse through pathological eating and purging practices.

These first years were ones of great joy and great pain. We grieved when one or another would relapse among us, for relapse was part of all our stories during those first two years. Monica P, our third co-founder, was much younger than Mary Beth and me. and she relapsed into drugs, alcohol, and bulimia in our second year. We all mourned when she disappeared from our midst for the last time in 1997. Our love for one another went as deep as our powerlessness over the disease we shared.

(3) CHILDHOOD: 1995-2002 (Age 2 to 10)

Our third year. 1995, was one of momentous change. Through my work with newcomer Elisa M, first as her physician, later as her sponsor, I was guided to the clear insights about the nature of the "drug" of our disease and the essence of what is "sobriety" for anorexics and bulimics. It was while she was in hospital, being treated by a psychiatrist, not by me, that these concepts came to me. One day while I was puttering around at home and reflecting on Elisa's condition, I suddenly saw a great truth for the first time: The critical element that had allowed me to begin my recovery in 1983 was the surrender of my food, letting go of all control over it and allowing others to feed me. With great excitement I phoned Elisa on the Psychiatric Unit where she was being treated for severe anorexia and bulimia, and shared with her what I saw as vitally important: to ask the

dietitian to choose all her food for her. to relinquish all control over it. She did this, and thus became the first member of our Fellowship to *receive formal meal* support. She has remained continuously sober to this day and will celebrate 13 years in September. I am so happy that she is sitting with us in this room today. And we are all fortunate that she and her mother Sharon will be jointly presenting tomorrow on "Self-Care While Living With an Anorexic or Bulimic."

Recognizing the importance of these new concepts—the "drug" of anorexia and bulimia is the feeling of being in control over our food and our weight, and "sobriety" is surrender of all control over food, weight, exercise and body shape to a Higher Power, the Fellowship added these elements to our "Preamble for Meetings." It is these concepts, and their clear definition in our literature, that continues to attract people to ABA today. and it is the one aspect of our recipe for recovery that is utterly unique, distinguishing us from all other eating disorder Fellowships. I'll say more about that later. Along with adopting these concepts, we changed our name to "Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous" in December 1996.

Apart from the "Preamble For Meetings." the literature we used right through 2002, for nearly the first decade of our life as a Fellowship, was the textbook *Alcoholics Anonymous* and the *12 Steps and 12 Traditions* of AA. We crossed out the words "alcohol" and "drinking" and substituted "restricting" or "bingeing and purging" as fitted the sentence and our individual behaviors.

In 1996 another pivotal person arrived on the scene. Joelle F. Her story is found in our textbook, and her sponsor was Elisa. The two of them lived together for about six months so that Elisa, now one year sober, could provide meal support for her. The change in Joelle as she stayed sober was dramatic—as it is in all of us—and provided powerful witness to the importance of initially receiving full meal support if we want sobriety. We were all starting to grasp the absolutely vital importance of physical sobriety as the foundation for recovery from anorexia and bulimia. Without sobriety there can be no recovery, and sobriety is not a particular way of eating but rather the act of surrendering to the way our Higher Power wants us to eat—and to do that we need another person. We cannot make our own decisions about food until we are restored to sane thinking about our bodies and about food. These principles were being lived out in our midst. We learned them the hard way.

There were many other members who took their places in the rooms of ABA in those early years, of course. Denise L, Lara S, Jessica C, Sandy B, Crystal R, Emma V. Gwen J. The list goes on and on, so extensive that it is impossible for me to mention everyone. I am singling out Elisa and Joelle because they were God's instruments as they hammered out the practical aspects of giving and receiving meal support, day after day after painful day, way back in 1995-96. and. as we all know, these concepts are still being applied today as many more people sober up from their eating disorder. Many in this room are receiving meal support at this Conference, and if you are new to it, you know the pain you are feeling as you stay sober for the first time in perhaps years or decades.

There is no doubt that the Higher Power who created ABA chose a few people to work through in our early days. And what I know about being "chosen" is that it often is not a pleasant or easy experience. Gabrielle Roy, a French mystic and lover of God in the early 1900s, heard her Higher Power say to her: "All souls are my favorites. Gabrielle. I choose some only to reach the others." And Edith Stein, a brilliant Jewish philosopher who died in the gas chambers of Auschwitz in 1942, once wrote. "I am convinced that whenever God calls someone, it is not for the sake of that person alone." In the end, she saw herself as being called to die for her people.

Just as important as dying for others is living for others, and that is what all of us chosen by our Higher Power to recover in ABA need to learn to do. For me, it is a lifelong process. But when I start to feel sorry for myself for being called to recovery for this purpose, I recall the last public words of Dr Bob in Cleveland Ohio in 1950, less than four months before his death, addressed to AA's 1st International Convention there.

"I get a big thrill out of looking over a vast sea of faces like this with a feeling that possibly some small thing I did a number of years ago played an infinitely small part in making this meeting possible.... There are two or three things that flashed into my mind on which it would be fitting to lay a little emphasis. One is the simplicity of our program. Let's not louse it all up with Freudian complexes and things that are interesting to the scientific mind, but have very little to do with our actual AA work. Our 12 Steps simmered down to the last, resolve themselves into the words 'love' and 'service.' We understand what love is, and we understand what service is. So let's bear those two things in mind." (*Pass It On*, A A World Services Inc, New York, 1984, p 339)

In 1997 the Fellowship outgrew Mary Beth's living room and moved to the meeting room of Sacred Heart Church Rectory. That summer Mary Beth was called by her order to move to New Brunswick and to step into the leadership team for her entire community, an international order of nuns. Without the miracle of her recovery from bulimia, that call would never have been issued. Sober, she was now being asked to serve her sisters in a new way. Her departure was a great loss for all of us, and especially for me, for her intimate friendship had provided priceless support over the previous five years. Nevertheless, she knew God was issuing this call, and her obedience in answering it taught me a great deal about trust and surrender to God's way of doing things. Meanwhile, God was providing for all of us, for Elisa was now almost two years sober and Joelle was a year sober. They joined me in leadership positions in our Fellowship—as trusted servants of all—when Mary Beth was taken from us.

Tomorrow evening at our 15th Anniversary dinner I'll read a message from Mary Beth, sent to us a couple days ago, and I'll share with you some things about her current service activities.

The following year, 1998, saw the opening of a treatment center in Edmonton that adopted the ABA approach to recovery, and its administrators invited the Fellowship to expand its Twelfth-Step outreach to that facility. Adhering to the Sixth Tradition, ABA maintained its separateness and independence, and yet was eager to cooperate with these

folks. Two new weekly meetings, on Mondays and Thursdays, sprang up in that center, and within a few months there was standing room only. ABA was now flourishing in Edmonton.

By 1999 a significant number of people were staying sober in their eating and, through the 12 Steps, had been restored to sane thinking about their bodies and about food. By now we realized we had stumbled across a way out of our malady that could potentially be useful to thousands of people with eating disorders who were still searching for a solution to their problem. We absolutely knew that our miraculous release had come about through the guidance and awesome strength of a Higher Power, and that we bore the sacred responsibility of sharing it with others. We began to talk more and more often about writing a book that would carry the message beyond Edmonton and at the same time preserve its pristine beauty, simplicity, and clarity for future generations of anorexics and bulimics. We reached this point of evolution when ABA was in its seventh year and our membership was around forty, and it took us another three years to finally get our textbook in print; Alcoholics Anonymous reached it in their fourth year, when their membership reached 100.

Many of you may have no idea of how our book was actually written and published. Since it is such an important part of our history and of our growth together as a Fellowship, I would like to share the whole process with you in some detail. These details tie into the need for and development of the General Service Association of ABA. so I think it is important to have the entire story recorded accurately.

In August of 2000 I was inspired to begin writing the manuscript of *Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous*. Since I am a writer as well as a co-founder of the Fellowship, this simply seemed like the right thing to do. We issued a general invitation to ABA members to write their recovery stories for inclusion in Part II of the work. The first draft of Part I was ready four weeks later, and an editorial committee was struck to begin the review and revision process. After three meetings this group abruptly stalled as differences of opinion and bitter disagreement divided us. The manuscript went on the shelf for eighteen months while we all continued our recovery work. We were not yet mature enough to collaborate on this work, and the delay was necessary. We were only seven years old.

The only firm decision we were able to make in 2000 was that we wanted to self-publish the work when it was ready, in order to protect it from alteration by a publisher and editors who might not understand our disease and our recovery path. ABA also wanted full control over the price at which the book would be sold. This was to be no commercial venture but rather a work of loving service to potential readers; the book must remain affordable and accessible to all. Furthermore, we all agreed that no one, including all of us who authored it, would receive financial compensation for our work on the book, nor would any royalties be issued later. Anyone who worked on the project would do so out of a spirit of free service to the Fellowship as a whole.

In March of 2002 I was moved to tackle the project once again. I revisited the manuscript and the feedback given by the editorial committee, to which I was now able to listen. I

gathered up all the written submissions of individual members and of Ab-Anon, a sister Fellowship that supported families and friends of anorexics and bulimics, and completed the substantially altered second draft. In early May twenty copies of this were printed and distributed throughout ABA and to several outside people who worked the 12-Step Program in other Fellowships. Chapter 15. "To the Family." was given to Ab-Anon for editorial review.

In August a four-member editorial committee (myself, Joelle F. Rachael B, and Rita R) began working in earnest on the revision process. I took the changes and progressively created the third, fourth, and fifth drafts. At the same time I worked as editor with each of the thirteen sober ABA members who had submitted their stories for Part II. I was busy!

Meanwhile, in early September 2002 ABA began holding business meetings every two weeks to begin the work of planning for publication. Decisions were gradually made about which printer to use, which professional editor to hire, which layout artist to contract with. Information about financial and business issues was gathered and shared. Legal advice was obtained regarding liability, disclaimers, and copyright issues. Possible covers were reviewed and one was selected by group process.

I then undertook the final stages of writing: incorporating changes in Part I suggested by the professional editor we had hired, arriving at the final draft of each story in Part II, preparing extensive footnotes, drafting a select bibliography, and compiling a comprehensive index. In early October I started working with Wendy Smith on the layout of the book, and by the end of the month the disk and laser proofs went to the printer, Friesens Book Division in Altona, Manitoba. The first set of blueline proofs came back ten days later. These were reviewed, changes made, and the final set of proofs returned to Manitoba on 18 Nov 2002. The book was then complete and scheduled for delivery in early December 2002.

From the inception of the project, we realized that substantial funds would need to be raised if the book were to become a reality. In September of 2000, all four Edmonton groups decided, by group conscience, to pass a collection jar at every meeting and request voluntary contributions. By September of 2002, a total of almost \$1100 had been raised, approximately one-tenth of what would be needed to publish and print the first 1000 copies of the book.

At the business meeting on 11 Sept 2002, we decided to raise the remaining funds by two principal methods: advance sales of the book and soliciting loans (preferably interest-free) from both ABA members and others who might be interested in supporting us. All loans would be repaid out of the first proceeds from sale of the book. Flyers, order forms, and loan contracts were prepared, and the fundraising process went into high gear.

Recognizing that ABA would need to have a bank account in order to receive and disburse funds, we appointed a treasurer and directed her to open a bank account for us. She immediately ran into the first roadblock of the project when every bank she approached stated that no such account could be opened unless Anorexics and Bulimics

Anonymous was incorporated as a legal entity. This led us to the need to create a non-profit business structure to deal with the finances surrounding the book project, as well as with marketing and distribution issues and repayment of our debts to those who so generously had loaned us money. We realized that a broad base of people would need to be involved in the society in order to make it truly representative of ABA at that time, and in order to distribute the workload and not unduly burden only a few members. An initial society meeting date was set for 27 Nov 2002. *six* days before the first shipment of our book was delivered to Edmonton.

As we sat with the question of what the non-profit society should look like and what its function should be, the envisioned society opened up into a service structure for the Fellowship as a whole. Just as Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. and the General Service Board of A. A. in New York are responsible for carrying the message of recovery to alcoholics around the globe, so the Creator has assigned to Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous the daunting task of spreading our good news about recovery to every anorexic and bulimic in the world who wishes to hear it. Literature is one very powerful method of doing this, and there are many others, e.g. this Conference.

In deciding on the composition of the society, which we named the "General Service Association of ABA," we took our lesson yet again from the pioneers of AA. whom we regard as our great-grandparents. AA's first corporate service and business structure was named the "Alcoholic Foundation." and AA made an early decision to ensure that the *majority* of trustees on its board would be non-alcoholic. They recognized that a gang of drunks in early sobriety were probably not particularly well-equipped to make sweeping business and administrative decisions for the entire AA Fellowship! We in ABA followed suit and recruited non-ABA members to be involved in the GSA, and have ensured right from the beginning that they compose at least half of the GSA Board.

The General Service Association was created in the spirit of the Ninth Tradition, as a special board to oversee and administer the service endeavors of ABA as a whole, and in particular to manage our outreach activities beyond the confines of Edmonton, Alberta, and Canada. The GSA was legally incorporated on 3 March 2003 and continues its work of serving ABA in a variety of endeavors today.

(4) PUBESCENCE AND ADOLESCENCE: 2003-2008 (Age 10 to 15)

Looking back on these past five and a half years from the perspective of a now fifteen-year-old Fellowship, it is easy to see that the publication of our textbook in Dec 2002 was a rite of passage, our pubertal experience. None of us could have envisioned what explosive growth would follow that event, for we were walking in the dark, as we always must, guided only by the Great Mystery who unfolds the future through the minutiae of "the next right thing." We wrote and published our book because we all knew it was the next right thing to do. Its almost instantaneous success and rapid distribution around the world—without any advertising or marketing gimmicks on our part—has confirmed that we were indeed doing God's will in publishing it, for it is his power that has placed it in the many hands who have benefited from it. Our U.S. distributor complains that they cannot keep the book in stock, and we have recently received our sixth printing of the

text from the printers, which means there are currently some 10,000 copies in print. Our textbook sells itself. It does that for one reason only: because our Program works.

We have to date developed two pamphlets, a kit of materials for starting a new ABA meeting, one for new Groups registering with the GSA office, literature on long-distance sponsorship, four sets of speaker CDs from the last four ABA Retreats held near Edmonton, and an abridged pocket edition of our textbook. There are now about forty registered meetings and Groups around the world bringing new hope to anorexics and bulimics everywhere.

The past five and a half years have been filled with the excitement of our early teens—new alliances, joyous friendship, endless hours spent on the phone talking with one another, laughter and giggling and doing things together, no longer within Edmonton alone but in countless U.S. cities, Luxembourg, Germany, Ireland, England, Iceland, Israel, New Zealand, Australia. Our circle of friendship continues to widen. New ideas, queries, and problems pour in daily to the GSA office, manned and computerized over the past six months by Katherine R, to whom all of us owe an enormous debt of gratitude.

Clearly, our ABA Fellowship has a unique and precious soul, one to which we all contribute and for whose care we are all responsible. It is a teenaged soul, one that craves autonomy and careens in wild self-assertion at one moment, then needs to be cuddled and consoled like a whining child at the next—just like any fifteen-year-old. And just like AA in its adolescence, we are beset by problems on every side—jealousy and struggles for domination and control, impatience and intolerance and prejudice, self-centeredness on glorious display at every turn, petty resentments and cliques. And, we are characterized by youthful exuberance and grand open hearts and innocent impulsiveness, by lavish generosity and fierce loyalties, and by moods that change every five minutes.

How are we possibly surviving all of this? We are not only surviving but thriving, and for one reason: because our soul is being tenderly cared for by the Great Mystery, the incomprehensible Higher Power that sang the soul of ABA into being fifteen years ago.

The General Service Association, our elected Board of trusted servants, has functioned through these challenging years like the wise mother of an adolescent daughter, quietly standing by, delighting in our growth, soothing us in our growing pains, and calmly and clearly guiding us through our turbulent periods. We are indebted to all who have served in this thankless role, and especially to the non-ABA directors on the Board, who have often been the voice of sanity on a side variety of issues. These selfless individuals, who receive no compensation of any kind for their generous outpouring of time, energy, and skills, are the real unsung heroes of these past five and a half years. Just as AA could never have survived without the non-alcoholic men and women who ministered to it in its early years, so could we never be negotiating the challenges and trials of our adolescence without the non-anorexic/bulimic men and women who have served on our Board. Our ABA Board members are richly compensated for their service by a deepening of their recovery, but our non-ABA directors—because they do not have eating disorders—stand to gain nothing in return for their work. Such modeling of humble service freely rendered,

without expectation of return, stands as a powerful witness for all of us as ABA members. We thank God for these men and women, and can only pray that one day we too will live out of such spiritual depth and maturity.

So much for this synopsis of ABA's fifteen-year history. Now I'd like to come back to the theme of soul in greater depth, and look at our task of caring for ABA's soul today.

CARE OF ABA'S SOUL TODAY

Thomas Moore, in his book *Care of (his) Soul*, distinguishes between soul and spirit. Soul has to do with depth of experience, with the unconscious, with the mystery in the ordinary and everyday happenings of life; while spirit is that principle within us that reaches for the heights, that transcends the ordinary to get a perspective on life, to find inspiration and ideas. Spirit has to do with consciousness, awareness, and high values. If Mary Beth was the early embodiment of the soul of ABA, then perhaps I was the early embodiment of its spirit. Soul needs spirit to provide it with breadth of vision, inspiration and a sense of meaning. The spirit feeds the soul. And, the spirit needs the soul to root it and ground it, to hold it in touch with the concrete and particular details of life. The soul feeds the spirit. Simply put, soul is root; spirit is wings. Soul is the residence of the Divine, of God, in us; spirit is the breath of the Divine. Both are necessary. Both have their place in all things human.

Carl Jung, a psychiatrist who is dear to AA, said that the soul is the rhizome, the rootstock or underground stem of life which remains alive in the earth each winter when the plant above ground dies, and which will bring forth new life, new stems, the following spring. This is a wonderful metaphor for me.

Soul is elemental, and needs to be fed by the elements. We always know when our personal soul is being fed. A few weeks ago I spent a few days visiting some friends at their lake cottage in a remote area northeast of Edmonton. Late one afternoon I went for a solitary walk along the lakeshore. As I walked, I was gifted with one of those moments in life that are perfect, and complete, and perfectly complete. The earth cushioned my feet with a luxurious carpet of green growing things. The lake on my left lapped the shore to the rhythm of some invisible drummer. The afternoon sun poured its heat on my body and its light into my eyes, manifesting the beauty of creation all around me—trees and shorebirds, insects and flowers, the sparkle of sunlight dancing on the lake. The breeze blew steadily into my face, caressing me and cooling me, carrying fragrances of nearly-unbearable sweetness. I knew in that moment that my soul was feasting at a sumptuous banquet laid for me by the Creator. I could have wept in my joy. By the time I returned to the cottage, my soul was replete, full. And, the Divine Being who dwells in my soul whispered these words to me out of that fullness:

"This is what the soul of ABA also needs—this elemental feast on a frequent and regular basis. It needs the earth of our properly nourished bodies to cushion it as we embrace one another with sisterly hugs. It needs tears to bathe it periodically, to wash it clean of the debris that our disease throws at us. It needs the radiant light of truth to be spoken in our gatherings, our meetings, warming us with knowledge of our intrinsic loveliness and

illuminating our way. It needs the wind of spirit, our breath carrying a message of understanding and hope from one member to another, to cool the raging fires of our disease, to caress us in our aloneness. to carry the fragrance of the love that heals us."

This is what our ABA soul requires for her nourishment. And all of us get to participate in laying the banquet and in feasting upon what we have laid. Soul feeds on conviviality and lively conversation, on shared meals and coffee times and weeping on the shoulders of one another, on deep attentive listening as we bring our pain and our trials to one another, in meetings and outside of them. The soul of ABA thrives in the concrete minutiae of these ordinary times, in attention to detail in our relationships with one another. In this we can all participate.

And our ABA soul is also fed by spirit—primarily by the Great Spirit and by the way he or she manifests through new ideas and concepts and directions emerging from our collective consciousness—its main spokesperson being the General Service Association. There we have been careful to give first place to the wisdom of the grandfathers and grandmothers, who continually refer us back to our roots in the 12 Steps, 12 Traditions, and early history of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I will now spend a few minutes looking at some current challenges facing the soul of ABA and us in our job of caring for it.

CURRENT CHALLENGES IN CARING FOR OUR SOUL

In our youthful fifteen-year-old exuberance we need to be guided by the ancient wisdom of AA. I say "ancient" because, although AA itself is only seventy-three years old, her deep roots are derived from a spirituality that originated 2000 years ago. We need to bathe the soul of ABA in the mysteries of AA through closer study of the Big Book and the "12 and 12." These are our primary textbooks, yet many ABA members today have only a cursory acquaintance with these books. I believe ABA needs to develop study guides for these books that are appropriate for anorexics and bulimics. I hope study groups will spring up that focus on these two tried and true textbooks. ABA is not affiliated with AA, yet we have appropriated its wisdom for ourselves, as have most other 12-Step fellowships.

Now I need to say something about our 12 Traditions. When you hear that, if you want to start groaning, realize that you are in good company. Bill W set down the Traditions in writing for the first time in 1946, when AA was eleven years old, seven years after the Big Book was published, and for the next four years—until they were officially adopted by AA as a whole in 1950, at AA's First International Convention, he talked about them wherever he went. AA members would groan and yawn and fall asleep, or call out, "Bill, don't talk about that. Tell us 'The Bedtime Story'!" They wanted to hear his story, about the way he drank and about how a white light filled the room the day his obsession to drink was removed. But Bill persisted. He knew AA's future depended on its members grasping and embracing the principles embodied in the Traditions. That knowledge was given him by God.

The Traditions are vitally important to the health of ABA's soul. The Traditions all thrust in one direction: unity. Unity, unity, unity. The importance of this cannot be overstated. It is the theme of this Conference, it is the hallmark—the evidence—of a healthy soul, and it is itself the pathway to healing. I knew I was healthy as an individual anorexic when I no longer felt as if I were multiple parts inhabiting a single body, when the warring drives within me—to self-centeredness, dishonesty, fear, and every other character defect—mysteriously became acceptable to me, when I no longer had to disown them and see them as aliens inhabiting me. This occurred for me—and still occurs for me, for it is ongoing—through the process of Step 6, grounded of course on the previous five Steps. And a group—any group of human beings—is healthy when it is united, when all diverse elements within it reach consensus, reach acceptance of one another, while paradoxically still providing space for and honoring their differences. To be healthy, the soul—any soul, individual or corporate—must be one. One with God, one with itself, and one with others, with all else that exists. Pat will be speaking about the Traditions and their importance to the unity of our Fellowship tomorrow, and I do not want to steal her thunder. I will say only that I hope our Groups will dedicate themselves more and more to a close study of the Traditions—using both the 12 and 12 and our textbook, which provides unique insights on each Tradition that are not found in any other published work.

And yet, paradoxically again, the soul thrives on the distinct, on the minute differences unique to itself and its own life, on the particular dreams it images for itself. For our ABA soul to thrive it needs to be constantly fed by appreciation for what distinguishes it from all other entities. This is especially important with regard to other Fellowships dealing with eating disorders—OA, the OA spinoffs such as OA How and Grey Sheet, FAA, EDA, etc. We have no affiliation with any of these Fellowships, although we maintain deep respect and appreciation for their membership and for the solution they have found that works for them. However, our ABA soul must be revered for its *differences* from all these Fellowships, because it is for these differences that the Great Mystery conceived ABA in us, its founders, brought it to birth in 1993, and has lovingly fed us and cared for us over these first fifteen years of our life.

What are these differences? Why do we bother dedicating ourselves to the care of ABA when many people with eating disorders are recovering quite nicely in other long-established Fellowships?

Let's answer this question by looking at what is distinct about ABA. Do you remember what I said earlier about the word "story"? I mentioned that The Greek word for story is *logos*, which can also be translated as "word." ABA's story, its *logos*, is also its word. The gloriously unique word of ABA, that which distinguishes us from all other eating disorder Fellowships, is really two words: "Control" and "Surrender." You will all recognize these as the words that define our "drug" and our "sobriety." They are explored in exquisite detail in Chapter 6 of our textbook—"Step Zero."

These crystal-clear definitions—the "drug" of anorexia and bulimia is "the feeling of being in control of our food and our weight," and "sobriety" is "surrender of all control over food, weight, exercise and body shape to a Higher Power"—are the one thing that

distinguishes us from all other eating disorder Fellowships. Were it not for these concepts, there would be no reason for ABA to exist.

The drug to which other eating disorder Fellowships are addicted is "food," and food, therefore, is what they must give up in order to be sober, or "abstinent"--a term which ABA does not use.

We in ABA are not addicted to food, and ABA was founded by anorexics and bulimics who knew we were not addicted to food, but rather to the insane eating (and purging and exercise) practices that allowed us to feel in control of our weight. All of us had been to other eating disorder Fellowships, and none of us had found recovery there, because none of us could identify with being addicted to food. Their First Step did not fit for us, any more than the First Step of Cocaine Anonymous would fit for an alcoholic. Some of us *tried to* embrace their First Step by eliminating certain foods from our diet, but that simply resulted in deeper descent into anorexia for us.

All people in 12-Step recovery know that the key element allowing the miracle of healing to unfold is the phenomenon of *identification*. All members of the group stand united on the First Step. Without that, recovery simply cannot happen. We need to become part of the "we" in order to be supported by others as each of us walks the 12-Step path with a sponsor guiding us. It is not possible to have a "generic" or "no-name brand" 12-Step Program. We need to know that we are powerless over alcohol or drugs, or food, or sex, or gambling, or insane eating practices, and that we are among others who understand precisely what our problem is and can thereby accept us exactly as we are.

So ABA was conceived and birthed by *anorexics*, who knew in our bones that we were truly addicted to the eating and exercise and purging practices that allowed us to feel in control of our weight, and by *bulimics*, who always identify to at least some extent with the anorexic need to feel in control of our weight. Over time we were joined by a few people who had previously identified themselves only as *compulsive eaters* or binge eaters, yet had been unable to recover through other eating disorder Fellowships. These compulsive eaters were able to recover in our midst because they too identified with our definition of the drug-. And many compulsive eaters do *not* remain with us because they cannot identify with our obsessive drive to feel in control of our weight.

We do not claim to have a solution for everyone with an eating disorder. We do welcome anyone with a desire to stop unhealthy eating practices—whether anorexic, bulimic, compulsive eater, binge eater, compulsive exerciser, etc etc. All who come determine for themselves whether they identify with us or not. Those who do, often stick around long enough to get well. Those who don't, leave. And that is as it should be. A cokehead will never find a home in AA, anymore than a drunk will find a home in CA.

ABA cannot help anyone whose addiction is to food. Nor do we need to, for there are other wonderful Fellowships that can. Our unique contribution to the world of eating disorder Fellowships is to help those who are addicted to the feeling of *control over* our food and our weight and our body shape. And, the solution for this addiction obviously is

not to eat in an out-of-control manner (i.e. to binge), but rather to *surrender* the drug—the feeling of control—to a Higher Power, We are sober when we are surrendered to God's will for our food, our weight, our exercise, and our body shape.

ABA does not recommend any particular food plan, but rather the food plan and exercise that each individual person's Higher Power wills for them. And that will be determined by their body's needs. This is to be worked out by the individual in concert with their professional team (dietitian and doctor) and with their sponsor. It is never determined in isolation. Almost all of us in early sobriety were unable to plan or prepare or serve our own food, because the drive to control was too powerful in us. We were too sick. So. we needed meal support.

We will be hearing from four international speakers, two this morning and two tomorrow, on the subject of "Sobriety is Surrender" and "Getting Sober." I look forward, as I'm sure all of you do, to hearing the practical details of how they actually implemented all these concepts I've talked about.

So, ABA's distinctive *logos*—*our* word, our story—is twofold: "Control" and "Surrender" These words were given to us by God in 1995 and must be treasured and protected by all of us as ABA members. They are the core, the *logos*, the story of ABA's soul. To adulterate them or dilute them by confusing them or attempting to blend them with the *logos* of other Fellowships will destroy the soul of ABA.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I stand here today as the broken, wounded and sick anorexic whom God chose to unite with Mary Beth and Monica fifteen years ago to give birth to this Fellowship. I remain broken, wounded and sick—thank God!—so I need to keep showing up here. I know my need of God at a far deeper level today than I knew it in 1993: That is the most precious gift of my recovery. My need is eternal, and it extends down to my bone marrow, to my toenails and to the limits to which my spirit is capable of soaring. That is the only fact I need to remember 100% of the time, for that fact is Step One for me.

I remain in a position of leadership in ABA today, along with a number of other people, some of whom are in this room. As a leader I ask God daily for the grace to be a trusted servant of all of you, of the collective soul of ABA in which I myself participate. I aspire to nothing more, when I am in my right mind and my personal soul is right with God!

I am not a saint. Anyone who knows me would be able to produce an accurate list of my character defects within two minutes, and would be able to cite innumerable examples of instances when I harmed myself and others through tenacious and dedicated practice of these defects. Such instances occur for me about every two minutes—on a good day! However, that is no longer cause for discouragement for me, but for celebration—because it is proof positive that I need God's mercy and loving power at work in every moment of my life. Furthermore, I know that my failures do not disqualify me for leadership in our Fellowship, for God seems to choose the most broken among us to work through most

visibly, in order to demonstrate his power—so that there can be no confusion in the mind of anyone about where the healing power is coming from! In AA, Bill W remained sick and broken for the entirety of his life, for a full 36 years after the birth of Alcoholics Anonymous. He was an arrogant, ambitious, abrasive loudmouth, an unabashed social climber and womanizer before he sobered up at the age of 39, and in sobriety his process of change occurred just as slowly as mine or yours! In his tenth year of sobriety he sank into a paralyzing depression that lasted eleven years, during which he tried everything to free himself—including dropping acid with Timothy Leary! He smoked like a chimney all through sobriety, and died from this addiction—of emphysema--in 1971, at the age of 75. Yet this was the man whom God chose to work through, to link with Dr Bob to bring the AA Program to the world. By the grace of God, and only by the grace of God, he ended up giving his life to and for the AA Fellowship, and all of us who follow the 12-Step Program today owe him an impossible debt.

Such is the power of God. Such is the goodness and mercy of God, who can transform sick and wounded people trapped in their own self-centered destructive behaviors, into shining examples of God's magnificent love.

Sisters and brothers, let us treasure the soul of our ABA Fellowship in all its hidden mystery. Let us each do everything we can to nourish it. It is a priceless gift given us by the Creator, the Great Mystery. If we do our part, the Creator will continue to keep the rhizome alive. We will go through many more deaths as the years pass. Members will come and go. be born and die; Groups will begin and end; the GSA will change countless times in its membership and its thrust and its vision as the wings of ABA soar to ever new vistas and peaks. But the roots, the rhizome, the soul of ABA will endure, sending up new growth as the seasons turn from winter to spring, for just so long as the Great Mystery has need of her. Whether that need will exist for another year or another millennium is not ours to determine. What is our decision is how much effort we are prepared to put into caring for her soul—and that will be determined by our love. For my part, I have pledged my love to her. for better or for worse, one day at a time, for the rest of my days, for on her vitality my very life depends. I hope many in this room have made a similar vow.

