

My name is Bernice Browne, and I'm an alcoholic, today I am interviewing A. Wesley Parrish for the Broward County Archives.

Bernice said I'm Wesley Parrish and I'm an alcoholic. I've been a member of Alcoholics Anonymous in Broward County since Nov. 13, 1947. A came into A.A. in Ft. Lauderdale on that night. I was introduced to A.A. by Jim Farrell. At that time he was about four months sober in this group and I must have been the first person he ever talked to, because he was riding on that "pink cloud". He certainly told us all about A.A., my wife and I sitting out in my front yard that Sunday afternoon. The more he talked, his pattern of life settled into mine, so I stayed drunk for three more days. Then I asked him if I could go to an A.A. meeting with him, and he said you can go tomorrow night, if you are sober.

And so thru the Grace of God I woke up on November 13, 1947, and have not had a drink since, thru the Grace of God and the application of the A.A. program. It works if you work it. I started this and Jim came by that night and carried me to the old Women's Club. At that time it was facing Andrews Avenue, in Stranahan Park, the meeting was on Thursday night, and it was the only group in Broward County at this time.

My wife says someone told her, and I don't know if this is hearsay, that I was number 13 in Broward County. I can remember a lot of faces at this meeting that aren't around anymore. Some stayed with the program and some did not, and that is kind of the history of it since I've been here. There's been a lot of people in and out of A.A. thru the years but some are still sober and doing fine and enjoying the fruits of this life, like I have. I have seen A.A. grow in Broward from 13 members to the size it is today, and from one group to I guess about 150 in Broward County. It's an inspiration to see this take place and be part of it.

My first meeting was at the old Women's Club in Ft. Lauderdale and that night there were about 10 people there. I remember Henry Trudeau, I remember that Bob Althouser was there, Jim Farrell, a fellow by the name of Rose that was in the furniture business. A girl by the name of Dottie Gay, I just can't remember the rest of them. Bud Runbaugh was there, Winnie Karnitz was there, also Bubba Humphries and a guy by the name of Merritt, he was the Chairman. Chris Christensen was not there that night. In those days they carried you up in the front chair, and they went in the back room to talk about you, to try to figure out which would be the best approach, to get you interested in the program. They came out with little tricks, like Stop and Look and Listen, the Railroad Crossings. In those days they didn't have those fancy guard arms over the tracks, but they did have a big sign, Stop, Look and Listen. They told me at the Stop direction to look around and see what this program was doing for other people. Then to start listening, and I don't know of any better saying to tell anyone coming in to A.A., after being in A.A. thirty-five years, than this simple thing.

A very short time after that there were three women, that I remember, one was Gert Gray, the other was Ruby Yeider, and the other was Clara Gutheremuth of Pompano Beach. I think Clara was the first person I ever twelve stepped or had anything to do with and carried her to her first meeting. She is still living in Pompano Beach, and is active in A.A., I believe, I seldom see her.

Elsa Jordan came down in the winter. A lot of them came in the winter, she was a maid at the Governors Club. Also Tom Daly, Tom was from Connecticut, and he came down during the winter. Of course the groups swelled a little during the winter, the tourists would come down every year. Frank Love came in later, about three years after. Another one was Chuck Frary, he came out of Chicago, it was four months after I was in A.A. that Chuck came to Broward County, he had been sober three years. Then we had a lot of transients coming in, especially around Boynton Beach. We had a barber up there named Joe Howe, he was smart and a very enthusiastic member, he used to come down to our meeting on Thursday night, and we used to go up to his meeting in the old Casino, I think the old Casino is still there. We held a meeting there every Saturday night, one of the finest meetings you ever saw. It was a speaker meeting in those days, there were no closed meetings.

Kate Stuckey had a five day drying out house. That's where Stepping Stones is now. She had a house full all the time. Of course back in those days, remember that I had a business, I was an electrical contractor, and I had to go to work. I mean if I were to survive I had to go to work because my business condition was in such a state, I had no other choice. I never did have time to frequent places like that, a lot of people did but I was always working, and at night I would ride up the highway to A.A. meetings.

We would start off in Delray, in a little church there in Delray there was a group that met there on Tuesday night I believe. They had a little sign on the wall, it said: "A Clean Start in Life" and I got more out of that little sign, than anything else because that was exactly what A.A. was doing for me.

Then we would go to West Palm Beach, at that time the meeting was in the old Odd Fellows hall, they have torn that building down now, and re-constructed all new buildings in that area. Some of the old members at that time are still in West Palm Beach, still sober and doing fine, like Paul Majeski.

The first meeting in Pompano was January 12, 1949 and there were five of us started it, one was Jim Farrell, a fellow by the name of Jackson, myself, a fellow by the name of Bacon, and Clara Gutheremuth, that's five isn't it? The first meeting was at the Methodist church in Meyers hall, it's still there, and at least forty people were there. They supported us all the way up and

down U.S. 1, West Palm Beach, Delray and Ft. Lauderdale, a real big crowd. The people there decided it wasn't going to be big enough from the first meeting on. I never will forget what the Minister said, he was sitting there listening to the program, and after the people finished talking and we were having a cup of coffee, he came over to me and said Wesley, I understand why this A.A. program works. In Church we say you come up here and we'll help you, you people don't say that, you say, you say you move over down in the gutter and I'll come down there with you, and he was a great friend of A.A. from then on.

I forget his name, but I remember him very distinctly. We met there two or three times and then we made a deal with the Pompano Lions Club, which was on old South Dixie Hwy., about three blocks off Atlantic Blvd., on the right hand side. We started meeting in that little building they had then.

Finally something happened in Ft. Lauderdale, I don't know anything about it because at that time I quit driving to Ft. Lauderdale except to meetings. I was going to meetings in Miami, the meetings were at the old Anona Club, and in Hollywood at that time, where Southern Bell Telephone is on Federal Hwy., there was a church there and we met in the basement of this Church. Later on Southern Bell bought this church and tore it down. They moved the meeting a little further east on the same street. But a lot of times Henry Trudeau, Chris Christenson, and I would go to Hollywood, on Monday nights, lots of times there would be no one there, but we had a meeting anyway. The three of us stayed with it, finally the group started and it took off, and when it did, back in 1959, I've seen as many as 400 people at the Group in Hollywood. Hollywood A.A. just took off and it never stopped growing. Then they went to West Hollywood and started A. A. out there. I don't remember any of their names because you just know them by their first names, unless you know them very well. I'd just see these people at meetings and call them by their first names, Charlie or whatever and that's all there was to it.

Something happened in Ft. Lauderdale, I can't tell you what it was, but anyway this conflict started and the Ft. Lauderdale A.A., is coming to Pompano, and also Wilton Manors is coming to Pompano, so our group in Pompano flourished from the very beginning. It was a very good group, and so since that first meeting, we have always had strong A.A. in Pompano, I mean good attendance. And at that time, as far as I remember, they moved out to the Presbyterian Church, in Ft. Lauderdale out on Tarpon Drive, they had a meeting out there, in Ft. Lauderdale, they had a pretty good size meeting out there but finally they started spreading out, all over Ft. Lauderdale.

Chris Christensen came to me one day and asked if I would go to see Judge Tedder with him, Chris was my sponsor, the finest sponsor

anyone ever had. Judge Tedder was the Circuit Judge, so we went to see him and Chris said he wanted to get a charter for a non-profit organization called the Twelve Step House, and he would like the Judge to handle it for us, he told him the purpose of it. Bob Davis wrote up the charter for it, and he asked Judge Tedder if he would sponsor it, so Judge Tedder said sure I'll sponsor it. The first one was over in the Maxwell Arcade, on the second floor. From there I think they went to Wall Street, from Wall Street they went to N.W. First Avenue, then they went to Andrews Avenue, and then they went to Las Olas, and then where they are now on S.W. Twenty-third Street. And so that was the way, and Chris was always willing to support the Twelve Step house, at that time it was the Hub of A.A. in Ft. Lauderdale.

In Pompano Beach, we never did have a Club House in those early days. We were travelers, we just went everywhere up and down the Highway and every night of the week we were somewhere. We started A.A. in BelleGlade, there was a fellow there by the name of Grady something, he was in the grocery store business, we was coming into W. Palm Beach, so we started the group in BelleGlade. It prospered for a while and then it would get small and then grow again.

During this time all these other people started coming in at Ft. Lauderdale, Frank Pierce, Doug Lairó, there's been hundreds of them, all wonderful people that helped build A.A. Here in Pompano there were many, a lot of these people have passed on now. In those days there was no such thing as these young people of today. I was thirty-four when I came to A.A. and that was extremely young. How old were you Bernice? (I was thirty-six) Well, you know that was pretty young. You add 35 years to 34 and by next year I'll be seventy years old, I am that old! (Don't feel that old Wesley, you don't look it.) Well, I can tell the difference, I can't do the things I used to do. I don't have the stamina I used to have. But A.A. has certainly saved my life, there is no doubt about it.

You see in Pompano, as I said earlier, A.A. has always prospered. My first pigeon's name was Frank Fisher. He was a brother of a very large family here in Pompano, they were big farmers, I mean big people. His sister owned Coral Springs, she sold Coral Springs to Hunt, thousands of acres west of town here. Frank was a bad drunk. He used to say I carried him up and down Federal Hwy., as a bad example. But he took to A.A., like a duck took to water, and he stayed sober and he married and a few years back he had 27 years. He had a beautiful personality A.A. certainly gave him, like me, it did him a lot of good.

Then we had Frank Pierce, Frank was a good A.A. member. Now the reason I'm telling you about these two men, Frank Fisher was a good superintendant of construction, he was a good builder and a

and a good carpenter. He never finished a job until he got into Alcoholic Anonymous. Frank ended up as a business agent for the local Carpenters Union. He was a great guy, he used to get up and recite poetry, his favorite one was "The Face on the Bar Room Floor" and "The Touch of the Master's Hand", remember those sermons? Oh I remember how he was, he was elegant.

FRANK FISHER had lost his family and he used to ride up and down Federal Hwy., with me. I used to take him every place I went. And he used to say, Wesley, if I could only get my wife back. That's the only thing I'm asking God for, if I could only get my wife back.

Well one day, about ten years later, we were riding along and he said, my wife is finally coming back to me. I said that's wonderful, when is this going to happen? He said we are going back together immediately and we're going to live together four months and see how it is, and if it's alright, we're going to get married again. Well two weeks later, he said to me one night, Yes we just can't make it, there is too much bitterness, there ain't no way for us to live together. I said well all your anxieties were in vain weren't they? It wasn't what you needed all the time. And it wasn't two weeks later when he met this lady, her husband had just died and he was a member. She moved to Pompano Beach and he met her at the Pompano Beach Meeting, those two got married and those two were the greatest couple. That's just one little story, he was one of my favorite people.

We finally outgrew the Lions Club, so Frank and Frank, both builders and carpenters, we went to the Lions Club and we doubled the size of the Lions Club. The A.A.'s paid for it. This was before the V.F.W., and finally after a couple more years, that got too small, because people were just coming from every where. Mens would make sandwiches, and the coffee pot going, in other words, the crowd was always there and we always had good food, good participation in the meetings and they were all speakers meetings.

Well, in two years, right across the street from the Lions Club, was the V.F.W., the members of the V.F.W., had built a building and bar and they had set up the walls and the belt course of a big meeting hall, but they didn't have the money to finish it. no roof over it, no windows in it, so we decided we would go ahead and ask the V.F.W. if they would make a deal with us. And they said they would so we went out and talked to the First National Bank of Pompano Beach, a lot of us sober ones signed a promisory note for five thousand dollars, and we put a new roof on. Of course Frank and Frank did this, I want to give them credit for it, they were workers and we put the roof on with the understanding that we would amortize the mortgage and take it out in rent. So our rent was paid up for fifteen years. And so this group just went leaps and bounds. They used to come from everywhere, and it has always been that way in Pompano.

And from that group split off the Intracoastal Group. Fred Stevenson and a couple of others started this group. They might have come out of Lighthouse Point Group, they started in a church, the Presbyterian Church next to the Intracoastal Waterway, I forget now when they built that new church, Lou Showalter had something to do with it. It was a pretty strong group.

They got dissatisfied in the Pompano Beach Group because of the way the group meetings were conducted. In other words there were never any business meetings, or any financial reports. One man was continuous Secretary, and they couldn't get him. I'm not talking about anybody, this is history, and if you asked him about giving a financial report, he would say to Hell with you. If you don't trust me you can go find another group, and stuff like that. Of course this is good for A.A. because this creates a little chaos, and gets people thinking and they started spreading out. This was how the Intracoastal Group got started.

Finally the meeting ended at the VFW and they went over to the Methodist Church and from there they went to Lauderdale-by-the-Sea. Now that group is at Imperial Point Hospital.

That's the history, but Frank and Frank really worked hard and we had a beautiful group.

The One-o-one Club started and that is where it got it's name. At 101 First Street, the Club was started in Dr. McLellan's office, he was passed on. We got a Charter, and a guy moved in from New York, by the name of Dick Friedman, Fred Stevenson and myself and two or three others, I can't remember, there have just have been so many people in the past. I remember one guy very distinctly, anyway the One-o-one Club started as a Club House. It was a club room for social gatherings and there was no meeting in it, and it was that way for a long while, and finally we got some members, Dick Sager, Gene O'Brien and a few more, dissatisfied with the old One-o-one Club. It wasn't big enough, it was in a bad neighborhood and they felt like we should get bigger quarters. And so the first time all of this came up, once a year if you have a charter, you have a business meeting, to appoint new officers, we just turned it down completely.

That wasn't the purpose of the One-o-one Club, the purpose of the Club was to come and have a cup of coffee, if you wanted to play a game of Hearts without gambling, or you could bring someone to twelve step them. A place where you could leave them and people would take care of them. There were about 60 members and the dues I think was two dollars a month. A little old couple kept it clean, their names were Jim and Alice Dixon, and it kept them sober too, there is no doubt about it. So that's what it was intended for, it was social. Well these members got a little excited about it, so they just set their hooks and they kept padding the membership. Next meeting when the time came a year later, they had the vote, to take charge of it, and you see as soon as they took charge of it, the original charter you could

not own property, and so they had to change the charter to where the One-o-one Club could own property. They had this spot in Pompano Beach, they changed the charter and that was where the new club was born. Dick Sager financed it. (Bernice: yes, but when it was turned over to the membership who paid off the mortgage in a period of about six years.) I don't know anything about it after that.

In the meantime they also had a little club room some where up on Federal Hwy, now I don't know where it is. (I think Wes is referring to the Fifth Chapter Club on Dixie Hwy.) In the old One-o-one Club we always had plenty of money, we had five or six hundred in the treasury, coffee donations and two dollars membership fees. In those times people came and sat in a club room and got sober. No meetings whatever, the first meeting in there was Danny Foley after he went to work for the county, he started a meeting on Saturday night, I think it was at midnight, that was the first meeting ever, after the One-o-one Club had moved.

Do you remember the psychopathic hospital? Oh yes, Dr. Hunter, and that was where Frank Fisher was when I first twelve-stepped him. His sister called me and asked me if I would go to see him. She said the Doctor told her, that Frank was not only dissipated, but he was found down in a rock pit in Miami, he was with a bunch of drunks and he was living in an old trailer with a gallon of wine by his side, his back they thought was broken.

They went fishing the day before and they all got drunk and he fell off the truck and he yelled for the driver to stop, so the drunk stopped the truck and ran over Frank, he had a bad back, so they had to go down and pick him up and so they put him in this little hospital. That was the only place that would take them outside of Kate Stuckeys, Kate was still in business at that time. In fact Frank went to Kate Stuckeys after he got out of the hospital. She put him in this little hospital (his sister) and during the conversation with the Doctor, Dr. Hunter, he said I'm going to tell you something. I can take care of his back, his physical condition, but he has something far more wrong with him than his back, and she said what's that, and he said, well, he is an alcoholic. And that's when she got hold of me. Did so I went to see him and then after that, he got out of the hospital, and we'd took him down to Kate Stuckeys.

He stayed down there, well he was there in 1948. I twelve-stepped many people in that hospital. Dr. Hunter was the only one who would take them, in fact he wanted to build a place on Atlantic Avenue Blvd., but he couldn't get backing or something, or the interest on the money was too much or something.

Hardy Taylor, lived in Belle Glade, remember I told you we were in Belle Glade, Hardy was living there, and he found A.A. there.

He was a fine salesman, and so I had to have a salesman over here, a manager for my store, this is before Reno started working for me, so I went over and hired Hardy to manage the store and that was how he came to Pompano Beach, he worked for me about a year or two. He was a tremendous A.A. too.

Wesley ran off the tape. (Bernice)