

Continental European Region



NEWSLETTER

Fall 2005

CER belongs to the Service Structure
of Great Britain as region 15

Published Quarterly

The Origins of Our Service Structure



US Servicemen were responsible for bringing AA with them to Europe, i.e.. Western Germany, after World War II. They were Loners on the various American and Canadian Army and Air force bases. They remained so until an Act of Congress (Senator Howard Hughes 1970) brought Treatment centers to bases such as Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, Nurnberg, Landstuhl and others. Then AA grew by leaps and bounds. The US Service men had always been affiliated with GSO New York,

All groups were registered there and the literature and information came from New York. As the groups and the Intergroup grew the idea came up to be part of the US and Canada Conference Structure. The first known letter was in 1977. In the answer to the letter GSO New York suggested that they form their own Service Structure. The suggestion showed that there were not enough AA members in the Intergroup to form such a structure. Letters continued to go back and forth. In 1980, The English-speaking Intergroup became affiliated with GSO Great Britain which caused a big riff in some AA Groups.

INSIDE THIS EDITION

From our Archives	p 1
Flash from the Past	p2-3
Dual Diagnosis	p 4
Depression & Controversy	p 4-5
Sunlight of the Spirit	p 6
Vienna Group	p 7
Upcoming Events, Trip to Vatican	p8

I believe it is necessary to know that when Bill W. and Lois came to Europe in 1950, Bill foresaw the possibility of the growth in the AA groups in Germany and Continental Europe. He told the members in Great Britain, at the time, that should these groups want to become a part of the whole of AA, to accept them into the General Service Structure of Great Britain. It was in 1950 that Bill W. was working on the Conference Structure of AA. As Bill was a great promoter, he could see the possibility of such a need in Germany and the Continent. As is known, the General Service Conference is the practical means by which the group conscious can express itself in matters that concern the fellowship as a whole..

Delores R. Archives-Region 15-CER



“Flash” From the Past!

The previous edition of Arena featured “It Took What it Took” by one of our pioneers. Here are some additional shared memories of his experiences in the early days of English Speaking AA in Germany.

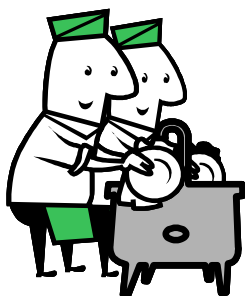


When I arrived in Germany in late summer of 1971 there was a small group (then called “Bills Group”) meeting in the Heidelberg Hospital Chapel Annex. That was before our program really gained recognition, before the US Army started their Rehab Program. I helped as Chairperson with the 7:00 pm “Open Beginners” meeting that was held in “The Nut Ward” of Heidelberg Hospital. There was also an “Open Discussion” Meeting held in the Hospital’s Main Conference Room at 8:00 pm (Monday night?) as well as a Wednesday night meeting in the Chapel Annex. I became an active servant in that group until 1974 when the military agency I was assigned to was transferred.

Bob A. was one of the founders of the original Worms group which started in 1972 I believe. Most of the people in the area rallied to support the Worms group when it first got started, little did I know that I would later become a member of that group myself... We were referred to as “THE DIRTY DOZEN”. We had names like; Dewey (the Duck), Bill (Bean Barrel), Don B. (Pineapple Bob), & myself *The Honolulu Flash*. It was a really great group of guys! As I remember we only had one woman in our group at that time & all 12 of us treated her like a little sister. We grew a lot together. There were also meetings at Coleman Barracks (north of Mannheim). I remember “Road Runner Red” and Haram B. who kept the doors open and the coffee hot. “Bubble Gum Bob” and Hoss H. were active members of the group that met at the Chapel in Mannheim Housing area. Charlie H. “The Honey Bee” was the Elder Statesman of the Ramstein Saturday Night Group.



Charlie was one of my sponsors. I attended his Eatin’ Meetins’ once a month regularly. NOTE: I had only been in AA 1& 1/2 years and after an Eating Meeting Charlie and I were washing dishes, he looked up at me and said; Al, do you remember Covington Ky. At the time, being as paranoid as I was, he scared me half to death. You see, as far as I was concerned, I had only met him in Germany for the first time. Charlie refreshed my memory by stating we were on a big drunk together 20 years before in Covington Ky. I almost lost it right there in the kitchen of the Chapel on Ramstein Air Base. We were both amazed at that coincidence and often referred to it when were sharing with others.

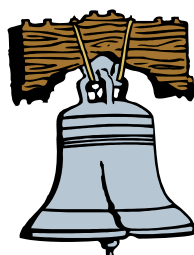


Flash Continued:

As I think back there was hardly a meeting I didn't attend during my stay in Germany. I certainly owe my life to my AA Family in Germany that so lovingly helped me stay sober one day at a time during the 70s and later in the 80s. Thank you all !!!



I returned to Germany, at the request of the Frankfurt Group, in 1979 to be the Sunday Morning Spiritual Speaker at the 25th Anniversary of the English-speaking groups in Germany. I brought along some friends from New Jersey: "Wall Street Marilyn", "Stepping Stone George", "Diamond Dee" and myself. What a wonderful time we had! I shall never forget the 1st Class treatment that the members in Frankfurt, Worms, Mannheim & Heidelberg extended to us. One of the members had us out to their home for a surprise AA barbecue. We were hustled out of the meeting hall after I finished my speech, shoved into a waiting car & off we went (supposedly to visit the Heidelberg Castle). The next thing we know we were at a surprise barbecue the Ole Gang had arranged. I shall never forget the peace I felt as I observed the love of AA in action that afternoon with my AA family. It was truly beautiful & for that I shall be eternally grateful.



I returned to Germany once more on April Fools Day of 1984. "Rhein-Main Bill", "King Arthur" & Uli P. (Luftansa) greeted us at the airport. I had been re-assigned to a position in Worms. I was again blessed to be the Sunday Morning Spiritual Speaker at the 30th Anniversary of the American Loners International Fellowship in Germany. In time, some of us decided to change the name of the "Worms Group" to the "Liberty Bells" group. Our motto was "We may be half cracked but we are liberated from booze". This Group lasted 10 years until about 1994. I have fond memories of the "Old fashioned Back to Basic" meetings we used to have, notably, the Sunday Morning Speakers Meetings. What a blessing it was with folks coming from all over Germany to share their experience, strength and hope.

I had a great time reminiscing about the 'good ole days'. I will say so long for now, wishing you much ALOHA and with continuing hopes for Peace Profound.
The Honolulu Flash

Oh, what to write about...

- ▶ Your experience at a convention
- ▶ Your group history
- ▶ Tell us your story
- ▶ Recovery related humorous event
- ▶ Something that baffles you

Any recovery related story is welcome

Send to: Arenaguys@hotmail.com

Deadline for next edition: Nov 15, 2005

Did you hear about the new AA group? They started a nudist group and the only requirement is a desire to stop drinking! It was working for a while but then they disbanded. The reason - they began to COMPARE rather than IDENTIFY.



Dual Diagnosis: “Many of us do Recover”

...“There are those too suffering from grave emotional and mental disorders”, yep, that was the category I fit into. I was an ‘in-&-outer’, sober for a few months then off on a bender. When I was introduced to the program at age 20 life was already in the crapper and by the time I made it in for good it was 16 years later and I was completely flushed. Once in that time frame I managed to get almost three years in by substituting adrenaline for alcohol. When I wasn’t in a meeting I was either working out or working up a panic, anything to keep the fog and confusion from rolling in. I was pretty much nuts before I started drinking. Simple day-to-day tasks were completely overwhelming and I found escape early on through chronic daydreaming, mental obsession or the blood pumping rush of getting in and out of trouble. What a relief alcohol was! It gave me a short window of feeling normal and that became what I lived for though it was ‘killing me not so softly’.

The downward spiral came at age 36. Within three months I had several car accidents, drunken incidents that endangered both of my children, then one very cold November night I was found unconscious alongside the Rhine River with a 4.2 blood alcohol level... Now this is where I have to pause for a moment and tell you that an amazing string of miracles started happening... It was snowing outside and dark, the River Police, by some fluke, happened to be patrolling that stretch, they noticed a collie on the path along the shore standing guard over something – me. I awoke in a hospital strapped to a bed, completely beaten, physically, mentally and emotionally. That was the start of my surrender but I still could not stop drinking. I made it through the holidays and even managed to stay sober for Christmas then New Years brought the bender to end all benders (save one). I couldn’t stop this time; my husband drove me in to the Counseling Center on Wiesbaden Army Air Field to get a list of AA meetings and met miracle number 2. A tenacious counselor came down to my car (I was too drunk to get out); She managed to get me into her office for an assessment, and accompanied me to a treatment center that very evening! This was an event; I managed to sneak alcohol in a hidden coat pocket, drank myself unconscious on the plane, was arrested upon landing (it’s a federal offence to be drunk on an airplane), was accompanied by the police to an emergency room where, upon regaining consciousness, I was released into the care of the Nottingham Priory.

My first recollection of treatment was the pattern on the carpet as I was being lugged in, I couldn’t hold up my head but I knew I was in England because people were speaking with an accent. There was a nurse on duty who was the embodiment of all that is good and kind as well as a counselor who called me ‘Trudi luv’. I felt like a long lost relative being welcomed home. Sensing the first inkling of hope I came to believe that night. They put me in the detox room and as soon as I was alone I slipped out of bed onto me knees and told God I was willing to do anything. The weeks ahead were spent focusing full time on recovery. I was sincerely grateful to be there and would have stayed on as a dishwasher if I could have. A firm foundation of recovery had been laid that I desperately wanted to protect. Upon arriving home I took the AA plunge, completely submerging myself in meetings and service work. I prayed and meditated before work, read the literature daily went to meetings, got completely overwhelmed with reality, came down with the flu and reached for the only thing I knew would bring relief. That was my last drunk. I figured I had tried my best and failed, I set out to drink myself to death, which I almost did in just three day’s time.

I came to this time in the psychiatric ward of Landstuhl hospital feeling fuzzy and hopeless, enter miracle number 3. The psychiatrist assigned to me came in for the standard evaluation that seemed very routine until asked if I had ever been diagnosed with a mental condition. I told him that I had ADD but wasn’t being treated. His whole countenance changed, he had this same condition and was somewhat of an expert on it. He stressed the importance of being treated, that my chances for recovery would be greatly increased if I address both conditions. I was given a treatment plan which included education, behavior modification and medication. When I was stable I returned to England, Roehampton Priory this time, for more treatment followed by a two week ‘refresher’ at the alcohol treatment program. I was blessed with a doctor who was both wise and open-minded allowing me to work on both areas of recovery. I left for home this time with the realization that I would have to embark on a whole new way of living. I quit my full time job and did volunteer work, I submerged myself in AA and had the most incredible first year of recovery imaginable. After 6 years in the program I’m still in awe about this new life I’ve been given. I feel privileged to be a part of English speaking AA in Europe where the service opportunities abound. There isn’t a day when I’m not in touch with another member of the program. Problems arise but no longer overwhelm. Life is good and I am grateful. Trudi C. Wiesbaden



What is Dual Diagnosis? A person who has both an alcohol or drug problem and an emotional/psychiatric problem is said to have a dual diagnosis. To recover fully, the person needs treatment for both problems

National Mental Health Association



DEPRESSION: NO CONTROVERSY?

Hi, my name is Hugo and I believe I was born an alcoholic and a depressive. I started drinking around age 14 getting passed-out drunk from the start. At university I took drugs as well as alcohol, though neither was the real reason I tried to kill myself at 19. As a result I had the good fortune to be treated by an excellent doctor, who took a more "biological" than psycho-analytical approach; antidepressants were the mainstay of his treatment. With the doctor's help, support from the university (plus an extra year) I got my degree. I moved to Spain, where wine was about 10 cents a liter, and drank progressively for eleven more years. By then I was seeing a psychiatrist, who gently tried to persuade me that my high alcohol intake wasn't helping my depression nor her treatment of it. She even told me she'd heard AA was effective but I wasn't ready. Next came the moving around Europe for work-related reasons sometimes "controlling" my drinking. By then, however, I'd had my first manic episode. That was a lot of fun, really, but not for my wife; and I was lucky - no major mishaps with the car or the credit card. So as well as antidepressants I took lithium for years. The point is, by 31 I'd had several periods of clinical depression each lasting 6-12 months or more and had been diagnosed as manic-depressive. In my last years of active alcoholism I was drinking myself unconscious every day. "Mama tried" (both diseases recur in my family; she is sober in AA) to interest me in AA but I just filed the leaflets away - still not ready.

I got sober with the wonderful Brussels English-speaking group at age 33, returned to Spain shortly afterwards, and haven't had to drink since. I started on the steps, which tackled any and every problem for a year until suddenly, crunch, I felt so bad I could hardly get up in the mornings: a further episode of depression. Outrage: here I was clean and sober and working the program, I didn't DESERVE this! So it was back to the psychiatrist and onto the medication, as prescribed. As always I continued to attend meetings at least twice a week and discussed everything with my sponsor. Thankfully neither the depression nor the treatment made me afraid I'd take a drink. I did not appreciate the tension from some members (albeit outside meetings) to the effect that I was taking a mind-altering substance and thus maybe not really sober, that I should go through the pain cold turkey if I wanted the gain.... I have that in perspective now and feel strongly that they were misguided, but it was unnecessarily disturbing at the time. I've shared this - trying not to engage in any controversy - on the few occasions I've spoken from the "top table" at AA conventions and have always been approached and thanked for it afterwards & told of instances where the hard-line attitude was, well, unhelpful - to put it mildly. It has to be stressed that clinical depression is a crippling condition in which the sufferer is constantly aware of his or her problem but feels there is no possible solution. It is definitely not something you can snap out of with a little will-power (sound familiar?), rather, a serious biochemical imbalance. Medical treatment has proven very effective and often includes the use anti-depressants. This is not dabbling in drugs but is often a matter of life or death. I for one prefer to take no medicines when possible; but know from experience that sometimes it's the only way. Discussing medication - for or against - at meetings ought to be scrupulously avoided; it's up to the medical professionals (and up to us not to engage in any controversy), "No A.A. Member Plays Doctor."

The hands-off approach to members' medical treatment is right there in the Big Book, on p. 133: "God has abundantly supplied this world with fine doctors, psychologists and practitioners ... Do not hesitate to take your health problems to such persons ... though God has wrought miracles among us, we should never belittle a good doctor or psychiatrist. Their services are often indispensable..." Page 13 of the leaflet *The AA Member-Medications & other Drugs* "Because of the difficulties that many alcoholics have with drugs, some members have taken the position that no one in A.A. should take any medication. While this position has undoubtedly prevented relapses for some, it has meant disaster for others. A.A. members and many of their physicians have described situations in which depressed patients have been told by A.A. members to throw away the pills, only to have depression return with all its difficulties, sometimes resulting in suicide."

That said, despite the depression I had in sobriety, and while I can expect to be afflicted by dark clouds again, it's no coincidence that I'm a recovering alcoholic, who keeps coming back, tries to work the steps, and thankfully, has been free of depression and its medication for quite a number of years. Hugo P. Cataluña, Spain



"It becomes clear that just as it is wrong to enable or support any alcoholic to become re-addicted to any drug, it's equally wrong to deprive any alcoholic of medication which can alleviate or control other disabling physical and /or emotional problems."

The AA Member-Medications & other Drugs, pg 13

“Step Into the Sunlight of the Spirit”

19th International Convention August 12-14, 2005

Leusden, The Netherlands



Unbeknownst to me, the journey to this convention began three years ago when I met my first sponsor on the island of Oahu in Hawaii. She took me to meetings, introduced me to awesome women in recovery, shared her experience, strength, and hope, and walked me through the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. After a year she left to carry the message to alcoholics in Germany. We emailed regularly, she gave me guidance as I gathered the courage to ask another woman to sponsor me (one whom I hold dear to my heart, who still sponsors me today from Hawaii). Shortly after I arrived in Germany to start a new chapter in this alcoholic's life, I called my first sponsor to plug in and get connected. The fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, and my Higher Power got together to make sure I would attend this convention after only two months of being in Germany. The power of this program is incredible and it only gets better. My first sponsor and members of her home group picked me up at the Frankfurt airport for a road trip into The Netherlands. Through rainstorms, traffic jams, McDonald's, and bathroom breaks, we arrived six hours later just in time to freshen up for the Friday night speaker meeting.



After saying hello to a fellow from my local group in Wiesbaden, we all sat down and listened to a woman from London share her story with us. Her sense of humor and spirituality were inspirational, I absolutely love the passage she left us with. “Begin where you are, do what you can graciously, step out in faith, expect God to help”. Immediately following her share was a combined 12 step meeting, “Relationships in Recovery”. It was a chance to open my ears, mind, and heart to how other alcoholics interact with all people in their lives. Fathers, mothers, husbands and wives, daughters, sons, and siblings, and soldiers, all came together in a crowded room to shed a little growth on a painful subject. I finally had some down time to sit with a friend and indulge in the best hot-chocolate-with-gingersnaps experience of my life. I don't know about you, but a cup of cocoa, good music and fellowship is a spiritual experience for me.

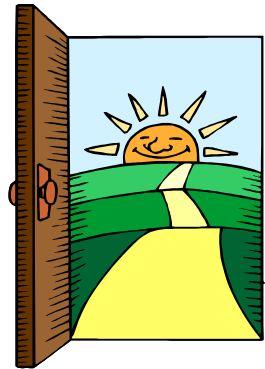


Saturday proved to be a very eventful day. There was a powerful workshop on steps 1, 2, and 3. The facilitator was funny and kept the workshop interesting by touching on some very important parts in the Big Book that had us all doing some reflecting. He had a delightful ability to take a word and create an acronym out of it that defined what the word meant to him. There was a emotional women's and a men's meeting on the same topic, “The Family Afterward” as well as several other English and Dutch speaking meetings. The hotel was accommodating and the food great. Saturday evening consisted of a Buffet dinner amongst friends accompanied by a cup of hot chocolate (I have yet to find another hot chocolate maker as delightful but am considering making it a mission). Two incredible speakers from the opposite sides of the fellowship spectrum highlighted the evening, both sharing how the program has changed their lives. The evening ended with a bunch of drunks cutting it up on the dance floor.

Sunlight of the Spirit Continued:

Sunday morning's speaker was a profoundly inspirational woman from Cheshire. She spoke from her heart sharing how she had spent, "a lot of years in the shade, totally out of the Sunlight of the Spirit" and how she has been able to step back into the light again. She also talked about, "sticking with the winners", it's important for me to remember that there are people out there dying from this disease, that I owe it to myself, the fellowship and the still suffering alcoholic to remain in fit spiritual condition. I love this program of Alcoholics Anonymous. I was dying in so many ways, and it saved my life. It is an absolute gift from my Higher Power and I can't keep it if I don't give it away.

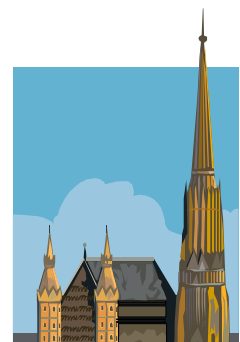
How amazing recovery is that a newcomer from Hawaii would find herself attending an International Convention in The Netherlands three years later with her very first sponsor. Thank you to the program, it's members, the individuals who made this convention possible, the beautiful women who have sponsored me and still walk me through the facts of life, and my mom who first introduced me to the fellowship. I look forward to the journey ahead of me knowing I still have the rest of the day to "Step Into the Sunlight of the Spirit". Alanna D., Wiesbaden



English Speaking AA in Vienna—the early years

Early in sobriety I worked for a suicide hotline called Befrienders. I had found AA through Befrienders and many of the telephone calls I received were regarding alcohol related problems. In June 1980 my boyfriend and I went to London and visited the AA Service center in Red-cliff Gardens. We met a very nice chap named Bill. I told him I would love to start an English-speaking group in Vienna and needed some pamphlets and literature. He was rather impressed about my enthusiasm and provided me with what I needed to start a meeting. Back in Vienna I figured my H.P. would do what I can't. Soon God sent me an English woman named Valerie and we started a meeting. The first meetings were open to any AA friends who spoke English (in those days hard to find). The third one was a closed meeting with 5 members showing up! Two new members came along, both Americans, (one was married to an Austrian he met in WWII) and after a while we started getting visitors and newcomers from the international community. At that time there was only one English speaking meeting a week, I felt lucky to be able to attend the German Speaking ones also. There was an Austrian who had lived in the States and returned bringing the Big-Book based American program back with him. We met in the baroque castle in Neuwaldegg with its beautiful surroundings, visitors were always impressed because it was, and still is quite lovely. In 1984 a lunchtime meeting was started in the Helvetian-Protestant Church in Vienna Dorotheergasse (a very noble address). A Third meeting opened in the late eighties at the Austrian American Institute. My frequent attendance had slowed down at this time due to my daughter's birth though I did frequent the lunchtime meeting baby buggy in tote.

An interesting trend started happening, a lot of native people were attending the English Speaking groups because of the spirituality there (they seemed to sober up a bit quicker). We now have, all together, about 42 AA groups in Vienna compared to the 4 of 5 when I first walked in the rooms. I'll never forget my German speaking AA friends who helped me through those first steps nor do I cease to appreciate the inspiration from the English speaking groups especially my female sponsor. I still attend both German and English speaking meetings, we have many young people of both genders, (when I came in it was rare to find another young person much less another female). I've had the opportunity to share my experience strength and hope in a woman's prison and look forward to more service work. We've had some very inspiring people become a part of English speaking AA in Vienna and I'm grateful to be a part of it. Brigitta H.-P



Have Your own AA adventure at one of the following up-coming Round-ups!



Osijek Croatia, Oct 7, 8 & 9th

The river port on the Drava, with a number of boats, renders a special atmosphere to the largest town of Slavonia. Important sights in the city include the main square, the promenade along the Drava, the suspension pedestrian bridge toward Baranja; the Municipal Park of King Petar Kresimir IV and the King Tomislav Park both from the beginning of the 20th century and the zological gardens is located in Osijek, along the Drava river.

Wildenburg-Castle, Germany October 21 - 23, 2005, Parts of the castle are over 800 years old, it even has a witches tower!



Bleichenbach, Germany November 4,5 & 6, 2005 near the medieval walled city of Budigen



Ostend, Belgium February 3rd, 4th, and 5th 2006 This thousand-year-old city is a popular beach resort with Belgians, who flock to Ostend for sun.



Ermioni-Thermis, Peloponnese, Greece May 19 - 22,

2005 A mythical land whose cities, towns, and spas were important centers in antiquity, and remain so today. Villages seem to grow out of the rock, others lie by the vast open sea.



Journey to Rome

An adventure embarked upon by fellow members in Great Britain

At the suggestion of the Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain, after the 1971 European Convention held at Bristol, Travers C. and I set off for Rome and the Vatican with the aim of bringing AA to notice there. On Jan 9th we flew to Rome from London. The recovery of our baggage at the Rome airport was a minor miracle in itself and our safe arrival at our hotel was yet another. The first two days were spent arranging appointments. Our one firm contact on arrival was the Rector from the English College. He proved to be a real 'ace in the pack' and thanks to Travers' energy and some fine help from the Irish Mother Superior of Mater Dei Convent, doors began open in miraculous ways. Almost as if they had been awaiting our arrival, those we approached helped us make and carry out the following program:

- Talks to the English, Scots, Bede, North America and Irish Colleges
- Reception by the Secretary of the Council of Laity
- Reception by Cardinal Wright, Congregation of Rites
- Reception by Fr. Arrupe, General Superior of the Society of Jesus
- And wonder of wonders, a private audience with His Holiness Pope Paul

The Pope greeted up very warmly. He told us his welcome was all the warmer on account of our work (AA). He said it was fine work, a real Apostolate. He urged us "To Press on with this work" and gave it and us his blessing. He presented each of us with the medallion of the good Shepherd and we had the honor of being photographed with him. It was the first time a reigning Pope has received members of our Fellowship as such. January 19, is a historic date for us all. We think this date will retain historic value and will prove to support our primary purpose. Through the Popes stated approval of our work, the world may further rid itself of its age-long prejudice against alcoholics, and by doing so, encourage those who develop our sickness to seek help and recovery more speedily and willingly. *Sackville*

