

RIPPLES

ANOTHER SLOGAN STORY

by Joe C.

When I was a boy I thought I had to be good, whatever good meant. To me good meant I could be a little bad, tell a little lie, do a little scheming. It was OK, as long as it was little, whatever little meant. I assumed that if I weren't good, then God, whoever God was, would come down from wherever He was and punish me. It's easy to see I actually didn't have a lot to go on. I knew He sat on high some place and didn't even need to come down here, wherever here is, to be able to see what I was up to or know what I was thinking. There was always the concern that I would overstep the boundaries and a little transgression would become punishable, whatever that was. These kinds of threatening thoughts can rule a kid's mind. They did mine.

On my way to school, I used to cut through Sheriff McFarland's back yard next to the Baptist Church. The yard had an anthill, full of red ants, near a back fence. The anthill was huge and probably came half way

up to my eight-year-old knee. The hurrying and scurrying of hundreds of these ants intrigued me. It was an absolute necessity that my study of their behavior included taking a stick and stirring up the beautifully perfectly organized colony. The fast-moving ants moved even faster and now helter-skelter.

I saw them running over each other and bumping head to head. I imagined them saying, Help! We are doomed! Get out of my way! Or maybe they said, What happened? What do I do? They appeared panicked and dangerous. They ran up the stick I was holding and I had to drop it quickly to avoid being attacked. I took note of where I dropped it so I could use it again the next morning. They scurried well outside the boundaries of the anthill, perhaps looking for their tormentor, me. I had to be careful. Perhaps they were looking for a cause of the disaster, such as an earthquake or a tornado.

I never learned how long it took for them to settle down; I had to get across the street to class. By the time school let out at 3:15 p.m., I could count on seeing those thousands of displaced tiny pebbles back in place again. It was as though nothing had happened and everyone in the anthill

had known what to do. Naturally, it was time to repeat the process after school. If my stick were missing I would use my foot, quickly stamping the ground to remove any attached attackers. Those big red and black ants could bite something fierce.

Then I grew up. There was still little doubt in my mind that God was vengeful and punishing. I thought he probably used a stick or a boot to stir all of us from time to time. We run around helter-skelter just like the ants, asking, "What happened? What do I do now?" Would that we could repair our defects and damages as easily and efficiently as those ants. Perhaps God looks down at our scurrying around in circles and says, "Yep, they're just as crazy as ever!..."

Then, as I began to recover from my addiction to alcohol and prescription drugs, I gained a different perspective on this Higher Power, this power greater than myself. I imagined a different scenario.

My picture of God changed drastically. Now, I imagine God living on a beautiful lake, high in a pine-covered forest. Each morning (whatever a morning is to God), the air is still and the surface of the lake is like glass. God walks down to the shore. And while standing there with His (Her)

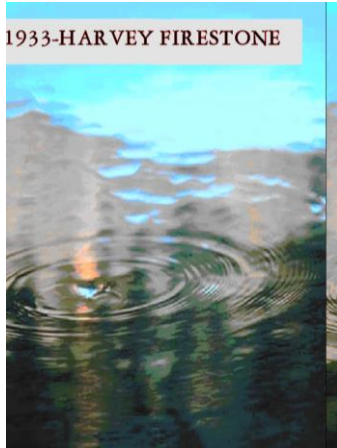
sandals just inches from the water, God reaches into the pocket of his jeans (apron) and grasps a handful of crystalline white sand. Each of those tiny grains of sand represent one of us, you and I, and everyone else to be born that day.



After holding those tiny precious crystals in His hand until they are warm and ready, He (She) then tosses them high out over the still blue lake. Each crystal arcs up and hovers over its special location in the pond. Then it drops unerringly into the spot for which it is intended. Each grain breaks the surface of the pond with short songs of celebration, Plink! Plink! Plink! And now each crystal turns into a Ripple. And each Ripple begins its run to the shore, running close to other Ripples, perhaps joining another Ripple becoming one Ripple, or just simply crossing paths with others.

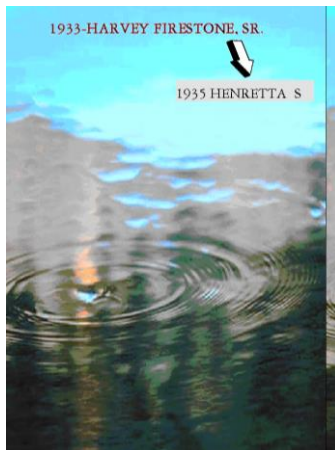
God stands on the shoreline watching all this and waiting for each Ripple to come home. Thinking on this, and possessing some knowledge of the history of Alcoholics Anonymous, shocked me into the awareness of how powerful God's Ripples can be.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their recoveries with one another. Their 12 steps of recovery are the basis of the program. The 12th step is a step of carrying the message to others who still suffer. It is the spiritual basis of "Pass It On", one of the great concepts and slogans of our time. Millions of alcoholics and drug addicted individuals, and many people suffering from other destructive behaviors, owe their lives and their health to this fellowship and the 12 Steps that have been taken up by many other helping organizations.



This slogan story is about some Ripples and how many lives can be touched. This Ripple starts in 1933, when a popular spiritual movement called the Oxford Movement was gaining popularity in New York City and other locales. It was a strict program of allegiance to God, with a requirement that its members follow its six tenets for a good life. In Akron, Ohio, the home of Harvey Firestone, founder of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Co., the movement was growing, too. Firestone, along with others, was indebted to and supportive of this movement because it seemed to be very helpful to alcoholics. Many of them were able to interrupt their compulsive and perplexing desire to drink. He was grateful because the Akron Oxford Group had seemingly done just that for his next oldest son.

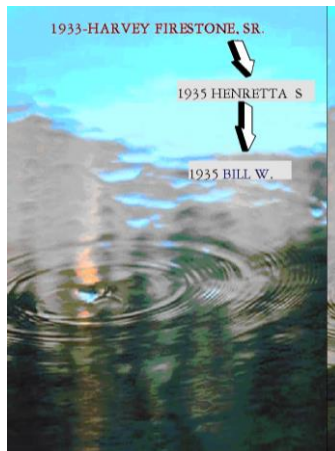
However, as those with the disease of addiction are wont to do, his son relapsed after six months of abstinence. A disappointed Harvey Firestone then left further support up to a colleague's daughter-in-law, Henrietta Seiberling. Her father-in-law founded the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. Henrietta was divorced, but living with her two children in the gatehouse of the Seiberling estate in Akron.



Bill Wilson, a stockbroker, a recovering alcoholic member of the New York Oxford Group and later a co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, was in Akron for a week on a most important business deal. After years of struggling with demon rum, having successes and failures in business and recovery, having numerous hospitalizations for inebriety, he was five-months sober and hoping for the best. He was there for a potentially wonderful business venture that would merge two companies. It would

give him financial and career security. This was to be a dream come true. The entire deal fell through.

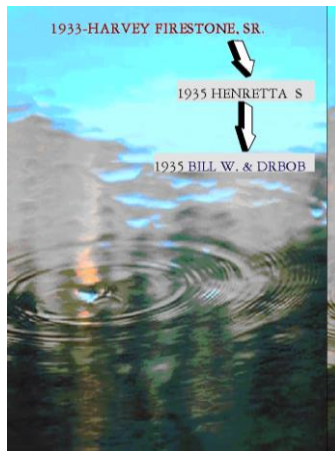
He was almost broke and it was Saturday, May 11th, 1935. He was distraught; he paced the lobby of his Akron hotel. He heard the clinking of the glasses and the superficial camaraderie in the adjoining bar. He was newly sober, anxious, angry and gutted. He knew relief was only a few steps and a few drinks away. His Oxford Group teachings and his past experiences, which he heretofore been able to ignore, now told him that he needed a drunk, not a drink. He needed to get out of himself and Pass It On, that which had been given to him.



He walked over to the church bulletin board in the lobby, called several ministers to inquire of any Oxford Group in Akron or if they knew of anyone in trouble with alcohol. He was given the name of Henrietta

Seiberling and a joining and a crossing, and a parallel running of ripples began.

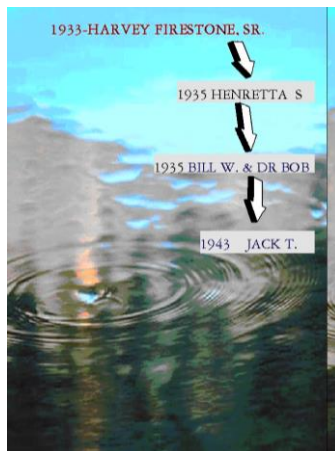
Henrietta Seiberling instructed Bill Wilson to come to the Gate House the following day, Mother's Day. She then called her surgeon, who was rapidly going downhill and about to lose everything due to alcohol. They met for hours and Bill went home with Dr. Bob Smith and his wife and stayed there for three months helping him and other alcoholics in Akron. Dr. Bob struggled but had his last drink on June 10th, 1935. That day is considered the date of the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous, though it was not called that at that time.



This Ripple began to spread far and wide. In 1943, Bill and his wife, Lois, visited Southern California, even though it was a difficult time for travel because of restrictions due to World War II. Bill's ripple became huge for

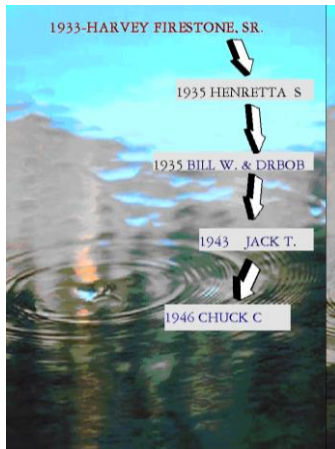
he was asked to speak wherever he went. He was charismatic and sincere in telling his story of sobriety and how the 12 Steps were helping so many. He spoke from Seattle to San Francisco to Los Angeles and Hollywood to San Diego. He spoke to audiences of all sizes, even as large as 1,000 at a time.

The California AA's were on a four-year growth run. It had begun in 1939 when a woman, recently divorced from her alcoholic husband, read the Big Book and shared it with Johnny Howe of the LA County Probation Department. Two non-alcoholics started the first meetings in the LA area. Mort J. of Denver, a recovering alcoholic, and many others soon joined them. Among them was a man named Jack T.

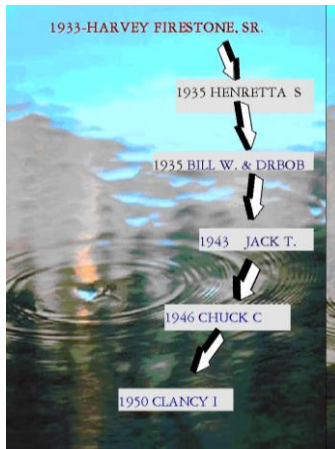


Jack T. was influential in the recovery of a man named Chuck C., who got sober in January 1946 after a horrendous holiday season of drinking.

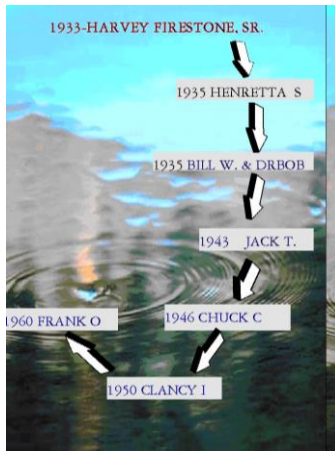
Chuck C. had been a very successful businessman living in Los Angeles, Hollywood and Beverly Hills. He had a wife and family and was just wealthy enough to be protected from the usual consequences of his drinking. His successes also contributed to his own denial that he was an alcoholic. Alcoholics of that day were down on skid row and had nothing but the handouts people were willing to give them. He was a stampeding go-getter, a tough boss, bright and addicted to alcohol. His wife, Elsa, like Lois Wilson, was addicted to him. This is a common and serious malady of those who love addicts and alcoholics and has come to be known as co-dependency. She would later become very instrumental in starting the first support groups in the Los Angeles area for people who had alcoholism in their families. These groups were later called Alanon Family Groups. Her husband Chuck would jump into his recovery with all the zeal he showed in his work. He epitomized Pass It On and was responsible for helping countless numbers through his counsel, his speeches, and his audiotapes.



One man he greatly influenced for a number of years was Clancy I. Clancy also had been a very successful businessman and he had also been a very intractable alcoholic. He had many interesting and varied careers, including being a patient in several mental hospitals where his alcoholism was treated as numerous types of mental illness. A common mis-diagnosis in those days, and not totally abhorrent to the person themselves. It was preferable in many quarters to have a mental illness than it was to be a drunk. He, too, became a sober knight in shining armor who attracted many to his authoritative style of recovery. Alcoholics are known as examples of self-will run riot and Clancy's "no-nonsense, don't drink, read the Big Book, and go to meetings, I'll be looking for you there," approach saved many lives. His approach is not for everyone, of course. But one could not doubt his love of recovery and AA.

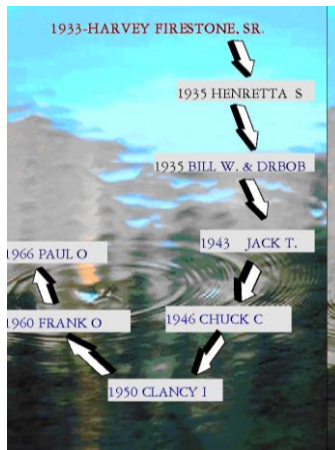


One of the persons that Clancy scared straight was a handsome, loud talking, jovial attorney named Frank O., who lived in Orange County, CA. Frank could always be counted on to help anyone in distress from alcohol and drugs. He was known as a good 12th Stepper, a person who carried the message to others. He had a great sense of humor and an almost arrogant humility that was real. He had no doctor/lawyer hang up about his own disease of alcoholism. He and his wife, who was very active in Al Anon. Frank brought help and joy to many in and beyond Orange County CA. One of those people was Dr. Paul. Frank burst into Paul's hospital room and hollered out, "Hi, I'm Frank and I'm an alcoholic. Ha-ha-ha... »



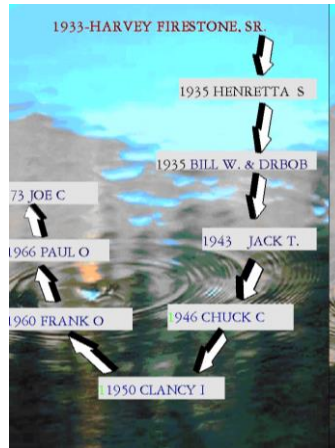
Paul O, affectionately known as Dr Paul was a registered pharmacist living above his family drug store in Ohio. He decided to go to medical school and become an internal medicine specialist. He and his wife, Maxine, whom he called Max, moved to Southern California. He practiced in Garden Grove and was well accepted and well liked. When his drinking and drug using reached the point of Sunday morning withdrawal seizures, he diagnosed himself. He decided he had a brain tumor. Neither he, his neurologist or the Mayo Clinic could find his tumor, but they did find a case of chemical dependency in a physician. He was introduced into a recovery that would have widespread ripple effects. Through his presence, his AA house calls, his talks at conventions and meetings, and his story, "Acceptance Was The Answer", in the latest edition of the Big Book, his ripple spread far and wide. One of those places a ripple spread

was at the national meeting of doctors I described earlier. They meet once a year to introduce new professionals to the 12 Steps. That is where Dr. Paul met and Passed It On to Dr Joe C., me.



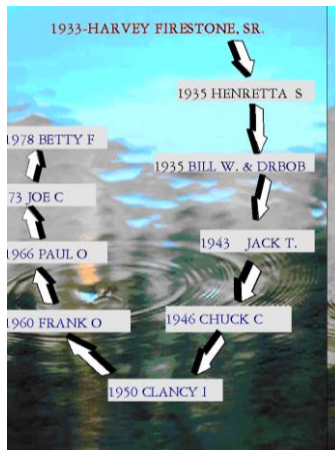
As I mentioned before I had been struggling for three plus years to control my drinking before Dr. Paul and some his recovering buddies took off my stethoscope and my doctor’s white God coat so I could come down off my pedestal and join the ranks of the recovered in 1973. I began my own learning, relying heavily on the slogans; “One Day At A Time”, “Letting Go.. Letting God.” and putting “First Things First”. I began to follow the 12 Steps and the advice of others in an attempt to understand what had happened and what to do next for myself and my loved ones. I volunteered and carried the message, as the 12 Steps say to do. Five

years later, I was in the right place at the right time and able to help one of my patients begin her own recovery. Her name was Betty F.



She and her husband had just left a very long and prominent public life and were looking forward to a well-deserved retirement. However, her excessive use of alcohol and medically provided pain and muscle relaxing medications were reducing her retirement to social solitude. She was literally incapacitated in her public appearances and civic duties. Her daughter asked me for help. Her Ripple began to change course on a hot Thursday afternoon when I confronted her disease. Needless to say, this confrontation was much to her displeasure. But then, on the following Saturday morning a gathering of the entire family resulted in her surrendering to her addiction, as all addicted persons must do if they are to recover.

One year later, in 1979, her Ripple glided over to her next-door neighbor where another family gathering resulted in another surrender. That neighbor's name was Leonard F.

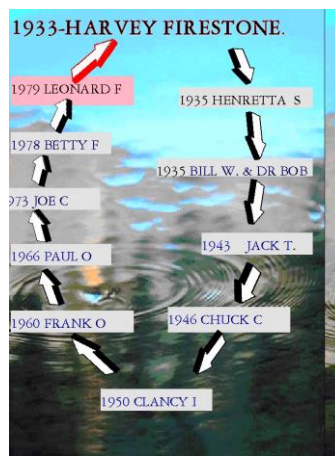


This was first person Betty F. had herself intervened on. Leonard F. had started drinking again after 12 years of recovery. He was older and had been one of her husband's favorite golfing partners and a dear friend to her family. She took the bull by the horns, and with members of the two families she marched next door and led a successful intervention that resulted in her neighbor going to treatment and remaining sober for the rest of his life. That was in 1979. Leonard F. has passed on now. He is sorely missed for he jumped in and energetically began many Ripples of his own. Leonard F. was Leonard Firestone, the youngest son of Harvey

Firestone! This Ripple had returned to its source 46 years later. This is the power of "Pass It On".

Each of us has our own rippling to do.

Getting back to those ants, I suspect that they were actually passing it on time and time again as they ran into each other and went head to head with each other. I think that they were most likely saying, "Don't despair, here is how we survive! Here is how we rebuild! **Pass It On!**"



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