

Thank you Akron.

I have found freedom from my food addiction by taking the recovering alcoholic's journey. I am a Big Book Thumper/Nazi/soldier _____(insert here whatever you call those of us who consider the Big Book the only instructions you need to recover from compulsive overeating). Those first 164 pages saved my life and then told me how to enrich it. I feel forever indebted to Alcoholics Anonymous for letting OA use their steps.

Every year Akron AA Intergroup honors the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous by celebrating the anniversary of Dr. Bob's (co-founder of AA) last drink, June 10, 1935. Since hearing of Founder's Day I have wanted to attend. More than 10,000 alcoholics and their friends and families travel to Akron and make a weekend of it. They take over the local university's dorm rooms and most of the area hotels and spend time in the city where co-founder Bill Wilson met Dr. Bob and helped him get sober, planting the seeds for AA and changing the world.

This past July I was on a business trip to Columbus, OH, two hours south of Akron, and one car rental away from a great experience. How often does any Wisconsin Twelve-Stepper get to travel anywhere in Ohio, let alone Akron? I emailed the Akron Intergroup Founders' Day link at www.akronaa.org, and asked for a map of the sites. They don't do maps. Akron AA Intergroup does personal tours, just for the asking (at no cost).

Akron is proud of being the birthplace of AA, and Akron Intergroup Council of AA takes great pains to be humble caretakers of the legacy they have inherited. Visitors can experience a bit of what it was like to be an alcoholic in search of a solution in 1935. My personal tour guide, sober since 1989, is a past member of the Akron Founder's Day committee, married to an Al-Anon (Akron's Al-Anon Intergroup Chair this past year), and an AA historian who sometimes learns more from the people he takes around than they learn from him.

I had three hours and could only do it on a Thursday. No problem. He said to call a few days before and when I arrived in town. Our first stop was St Thomas Hospital where Dr. Bob and Sister Ignatia helped 5000 alcoholics get sober. I got to pray in the hospital chapel where Sr. Ignatia sent people to "speak to their maker." I went to one of the upper floors where there still is an alcohol/drug rehab unit, which strives to provide the same kind of care, insurance benefits willing, that Dr. Bob gave almost 70 years ago. We went to the Akron AA Intergroup offices where they sell some of the same literature that was passed around before someone at AA's main office came up with the phrase "conference-approved literature". It got me thinking about my addiction, food. Were the words bulimia and anorexia even in the dictionary then? If you told someone you were a compulsive overeater in 1935, what kind of response would you get? Was it possible to be a food addict when there was a depression going on?

I saw Akron Intergroup's archives and a beautiful stained glass installation of the artwork titled "The Man on the Bed".

We drove past the location of the King School, home of the oldest AA meeting in the world, which has been active since 1935 (Dr. Bob was an attendee). We visited Dr. Bob's house where I walked up 12 steps from the front walk to the front door. (Yes, you need to take 12 steps to get into Dr. Bob and his wife Anne's house). I saw the bedrooms where the alcoholics detoxed before there was such a word as detox. I saw the back porch where Dr. Bob's bootlegger left his supply and the laundry chute where Dr. Bob hid it from Anne. I sat at Anne Smith's kitchen table and had my picture taken in front of a coffee pot that is identical to the one Anne and Bob used to make coffee for the alcoholics and the families they served. My first thought? I wonder what kind of cookies they ate with that coffee. Then, I wondered if anyone in this house compulsively overate? You know Anne wasn't exactly slim.

We also went to the gatehouse where Henrietta Seiberling introduced Dr. Bob to Bill Wilson at a dinner party. I peered through the window and saw the room where they had the five-hour long conversation that gave Dr. Bob hope for sobriety. I wondered what Henrietta served for dinner that night. Was she a good cook? The grounds around the gatehouse, as well as the gatehouse and main house, are beautifully restored and now open for tours. We stopped at Dr. Bob's and Anne's graves where it is a tradition for people to leave their chips on the headstone. I counted the years on the six chips left there and they totaled more than 100 years of sobriety, all due to the efforts of two men and the spiritual actions that they chose to take almost 70 years ago. I had six years and five years of abstinence at that time, proof that miracles do happen.

My generous host, Bob C., said that he considers it a privilege to take people on these tours. I used up more than the three hours I had set aside, and if I had known what was available to see I could have stayed three days. (Akron AA has extensive archives that are open to visitors and some do stay more than three days, studying the history.)

It never occurred to me that building archives, maintaining an old home, or giving someone a tour of the AA sites in Akron was twelve step service. I then thought about Rosanne, our 75-year old co-founder, who kept coming back until she got it. If we had to build an archive of Overeaters Anonymous history, what would be in there? Old copies of Lifeline, her first food scale? Photos of her and her two co-founders (faces obscured of course?)

What Akron has preserved is a slice of life in 1935. What they give to the recovering community is an amazing experience. I didn't think that the tour would be anything other than an interesting history lesson, but seeing how very ordinary and simple all of the sites were made them real to me. Very ordinary people recovered then and they can recover now. *I am an ordinary person.* The Big Book came alive thanks to people in Akron who believe in action.

-- L. P.