

## **Dale M., of the Hyannis Men's Big Book Step Study, Cape Cod, Massachusetts**

*Dale M. gave a talk in November, 2000, on the occasion of the Asheville (NC) Big Book Step Study Group's first anniversary. This is only the part that covers Dale's recollection of how the Hyannis Men's Big Book Step Study got its start. The first 8 minutes of Dale's remarks were not recorded due to operator error; the recording picks up where Dale starts to talk about the history of the group, and then it's clipped off before he finished. From earlier notes I had attached to this transcription document, it seems that Dale also discussed the beginning of the Daytona meeting but that portion seems also to have been clipped off, probably because the recording device ran out of battery power. —notes by Suzanne T., Oct. 22, 2014*

“So, what happened at that time, I moved in with my sponsor, who (at that time I was sober, I don't know, five or six years; the years are not that important, but, I guess I was sober six years) and my friend, Don, was sober three years. And Don had a little situation with his girlfriend. He was walking in the dunes in Truro—the girl was just a sweetheart, and for some reason he got a little angry—I hope he doesn't mind me telling this part of his story—but he wound up trying to choke his girlfriend—in sobriety, in sobriety—and he was totally amazed that this happened. How could it happen to him if he hadn't been drinking? Why was he like this?”

And so Don, he picked up the Big Book, and went by the numbers, word for word. He took the book out, and he read it, and when it said to do something, he did it. And he was living with me at this time.

Of course I was kind of paying attention, but not really. I didn't care about the Big Book or what Donny was doing that much, although he was a friend of mine. So Donny went through this, and I saw this wonderful transformation take place in Don. And I began to scratch my head now; I'm kind of watching it.

Then Donny had a friend, Chris, who broke down a door in an apartment, in an attempt to communicate with his girlfriend. And Chris wound up with handcuffs on that night. So Chris called Don and said, “Don, can you help me?” and Don said, “You know, I've just been going through the Book”—this is over a course of time—“and I'll help you. What's helped me a lot is doing these steps. Why don't you do the steps? I'll show you what I did, and we'll work together, and we'll go by the numbers, word for word, and we'll do the steps.”

So Chris said, “Okay”—with the handcuffs on, what was he going to say?

Chris went through the steps. Chris had a monumental fourth step. Notebooks, like this. He had a lot of work. He did a lot of work. He was desperate; he wrote like a madman, every day. Then Donny heard his Fifth Step.

Then, there was another guy that came into the picture that Donny worked with. Now there were three. And there was another heroin addict that arrived, with a broken wrist and no license; he'd smashed his Harley.

So now there were three or four of them. We had a meeting. We decided we would have a meeting. We were just going to do a meeting on the fifth chapter. This was in February of 1980, I believe. We were just going to do a meeting on the fifth chapter, and the way we were going to run it—not we, I wasn't running it—but the way it was run was, we took the book out, and we were going to start with the word *rarely* (“Rarely have we seen a person who has thoroughly

followed our path...”) and we were going to read, and when someone didn’t understand something, we would stop and discuss it, and make sure everybody understood it.

So there was Donny, and there was Vinnie [who] was a pilot—we met out in his trailer at the airport, and there was another pilot, and there was Bill S., and Chris.

We read, and someone said, “Rarely...” and someone said, “Whoa, hold it.” The first meeting was on the word *rarely*. We talked for an hour and a half on the word *rarely*.

So, it kind of died off, for a while, and then Chris said he went into the hangar and he got a room. Chris said, “Don, why don’t you start a meeting? We’ll have a meeting, where we meet and we’ll learn to do the steps this way. Donny said, “I’m not starting it. Why don’t you start it?” So Chris went into the airport, in one of the hangars, he got a room, and the meeting started.

At that time, I was working on Thursday nights. I wasn’t able to attend the meeting. I never went—it only met for a couple of weeks in the hangar, and I didn’t go to the meeting. Then, we got a room at Cape Cod Community College, in Hyannis. That’s when I started going to the meeting.

And there were about six or eight people at the meeting. The way we used to run it—I remember at that time we were kind of fighting, it’s funny, when you read that preamble, that’s the preamble that was written about that time—and it’s really kind of funny, I was always like a dissenting voice in the group. I wanted part of that taken out. I think if seven people voted, there were six for, and me against. So they kept it, they kept the format. And I first, I thought, that’s baloney. But recently I’ve really come to believe that it’s important—I don’t know why—to maintain the format. So we’ve always read that format in Hyannis.

In the meantime, the group was getting bigger—not much, though; for a long time, it’s funny, we were the most hated group in Hyannis. Now, I had a little bit of respect around the group, because by now I’d been sober for eight years, eight or nine years; and the group had been going for a couple of years. And people used to come up to me—there’d be a group here and a group there—the meetings were a little bit bigger on the Cape, and there’d be these groups, and I’d be in one group and someone would sneak over to me and give me a little elbow and go, “Do know that Hyannis group?” and I’d go, “Yeah.” And they’d say, “Well, doesn’t so-and-so go there, and isn’t he a jerk?” And I go, “Yeah, so-and-so goes there, and he is a jerk.” He said, “Well, don’t they have very strict rules? Isn’t it like”—they used to call us Nazi A.A., the bodysnatchers. That’s what they’d call us.

A lot of retreads—lot of people that would pick up after eight or ten years—would come back to that group, looking for help. What could they do that they didn’t do before? A lot of people who were unhappy in their sobriety, they were breaking down doors. A lot of people who were around the program for years and years and years, couldn’t get sober, would come to that group. But, only the desperate would come. Nobody was coming for the social deal; it wasn’t the place to be. As a matter of fact, a lot of people in A.A. were saying, Stay away from there; stay away.

We had a woman—a woman’s group started up—and the woman was like a saint in A.A. She was thirty-three years sober. And this girl had finished her Fifth Step. She was nine months sober, and she was chairing the meeting. This woman—Harry knows this woman, she moved to Florida, lived in the same town as Harry—wonderful, wonderful person, great lady—and she spoke at the meeting. The chairperson said—Donna, her name was—Donna said, “Excuse me, have you done the steps the way they’re laid out in the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*?” And

the woman said, "Well, no, not exactly this way." And she said, "I'm going to have to ask you to pass." And there was this silence that went over the room. The word spread like wildfire in Hyannis, and everybody said, Stay away from there; they wouldn't let so-and-so speak. It was like, Oh my God, they wouldn't let her speak?

The meeting stayed small for a long time; it did, it stayed very small. In the eighties, for the first five years of the meeting, there were only ten people, twelve people, fifteen people. Then, all of a sudden, it exploded. We had 150 people at the Men's Big Book Step Study. We had this guy, John [P.], who you know, you mentioned [he had] moved to Connecticut, drove from Wooster to Hyannis every Thursday night, 100 miles one way, every Thursday night. We had people coming from all over, to learn how to do the steps. Next thing you know, someone started a meeting; another meeting came up, and another meeting came up. We didn't do this to start meetings, or— shouldn't say "we"; I really wasn't one of them. But, the people who started the meeting: Donny, Chris, Billy, they weren't interested in what anyone else was doing; they didn't care, they didn't care. All they knew was their ass was on fire, and they needed to have it put out. And that's how things got going, and that's why people were drawn to the meeting. The same type of people went there: people who had no place else to go, tried everything, couldn't get sober, had enough, fed up with their own behavior...they came. And all of a sudden, people started seeing those people getting better, and they went, Whoa, something's going on over there, let's go; let's see what this is about. And it just grew.

In 1985, I quit my job. I'd been working in the supermarket for twelve years, and I'd been sober eleven years. And I walked in, and I quit. I was the assistant manager. I said, "I'm giving my notice." They asked, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I don't know. I can't do this anymore. I don't like it."

Anyway, to go on with this, now, I hadn't started writing the Fourth Step. Remember now, I was one, two, and I had all kinds of moral inventories. I had the Hazelden guide, I had the Twelve and Twelve, you know, using the seven deadlies. I tried doing a history of my life, you know, like a narrative-type Fourth Step. I had all these types of Fourth Steps, and I gave away part of one of those one time, as a Fifth Step, and I never really went on in the steps, even though I was sober at this time six-and-a-half years, whatever it was. I was doing another one of these moral inventories, I don't know what the heck method I was using at the time, and I saw my friend, Donny, at the meeting, and I said, "Don, Don, I'm doing a Fourth Step." And he says, "Are you doing it the way the Big Book lays it out?"

And I said, "No, not reall—" and he turned around and walked away from me. And I got so mad at him—I got so much anger and resentment toward him I wanted to run after him and strangle him.

Then I thought, those guys all think they're better than me. What do they think? Who do they think they are? I'm sober six and a half years; Donny's sober four years; Chris is only sober a year; Billy's sober a year. Who do those guys think they are, trying to tell me? I went on in my turmoil, in my darkness and my hatred. I was full of resentment, really.

I went back to Donny, and I said, "Donny, will you help me? Will you help me to write a Fourth Step?"

He said, "Well, if you get that far; but, if I work with you, we're going to start with Step One. We're going to start at the beginning."

I said, "Donny, I'm six-and-a-half years sober. I know what's going on."

"We're going to go by the book; we're going to start with One, and we're going to follow through."

I said, "Okay. I'll do it."