

ACA HISTORY

Included here is "The Laundry List", the Early History of ACA, a timeline, and recollections of some of the people who were instrumental in building what is now the program of Adult Children of Alcoholics and the World Service structure of Adult Children of Alcoholics.

The "Laundry List"

In the beginning was a meeting of Al-Anon people too old for their Alateen meeting. They decided to keep meeting because it had been helpful in their recovery to discuss what it was like growing up in an alcoholic home. They asked people they heard in other meetings to speak at their meeting. Tony A. was one such speaker. He had been vocal in 12-Step meetings he attended about the effects of his parents' alcoholism on his adult life. This was in concert with the focus of the meeting, so he was asked to speak at the young people's meeting. He realized after a period this group was operating without a defined identity. He said he would write down the characteristics he felt he and the group of young people shared. He read the list at the next meeting when one of the participants cried out, "That's my laundry list!" This is that "Laundry List."

These are characteristics we seem to have in common due to being brought up in an alcoholic household.

- a) We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.
- b) We became approval seekers and lost our identity in the process.
- c) We are frightened by angry people and any personal criticism.
- d) We either become alcoholics, marry them, or both, or find another compulsive personality such as a workaholic to fulfill our sick abandonment needs.
- e) We live life from the viewpoint of victims and are attracted by that weakness in our love and friendship relationships.
- f) We have an overdeveloped sense of responsibility and it is easier for us to be concerned with others rather than ourselves. This enables us not to look too closely at our own faults.
- g) We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.
- h) We become addicted to excitement.
- i) We confuse love with pity and tend to "love" people who we can pity and rescue.
- j) We have stuffed our feelings from our traumatic childhoods and have lost the ability to feel or express our feelings because it hurts so much (denial).
- k) We judge ourselves harshly and have a very low sense of self-esteem.
- l) We are dependent personalities who are terrified of abandonment and will do anything to hold on to a relationship in order not to experience painful abandonment feelings which we received from living with sick people who were never there emotionally for us.
- m) Alcoholism is a family disease and we became para-alcoholics and took on the characteristics of the disease even though we did not pick up the drink.

n) Para-alcoholics are reactors rather than actors.

Tony A., 1977

EARLY HISTORY: An Interview with Tony A.

At the end of 1976 or the beginning of 1977, four or five young people who had recently "graduated" from Alateen joined Al-Anon, the adult version of their program. In Alateen they had explored the impact that alcoholic and co-alcoholic parents, and living in an alcoholic household, had on their lives. Entering Al-Anon, they were suddenly faced with the concept of learning to live serenely in a dysfunctional setting. We can only guess at the inner turmoil this presented to these young adults, not to mention being afraid to displease the parent figures around them in Al-Anon. Alateen must have taught them well how to get their own needs met. They formed their own Al-Anon meeting which they named "Hope for Adult Children or Alcoholics". They met at the Smithers Building in Manhattan. This group used the Al-Anon Greeting and Closing, but "winged" the rest of the meeting.

At the same time there was an older member of Al-Anon and AA who had turned his sharing focus to the impact his "ancient history" in an alcoholic home of origin had on his adult life. Tony A. was about fifty years old then. Cindy, a member of the "Hope for Adult Children of Alcoholics" group heard him and asked him to be a guest speaker at her group. Tony A. went and shared his experience, strength, and hope on the characteristics he found he had in his adult life due to growing up in an alcoholic home. The former Alateens were in their early twenties while Tony was half a century old, yet the difference in their ages dissolved with the shared background, experiences, and feelings. There were tears and laughter and a sense of belonging and understanding that transcended the years. They identified with Tony and he stayed.

After six or seven months, instead of the increasing membership they expected, the fledgling meeting has dwindled to three or four people. The meeting was about to fold. Something rather powerful in Tony motivated him to invite members of Alcoholics Anonymous to join the little group. Some of them, after all, had alcoholic parents of their own, didn't they? Seventeen members of AA showed up that next week. At the following meeting there were fifty people. At the next there were over one hundred AAs. The somewhat radical Al-Anon meeting was on its way with a lot of help from some very good friends.

The group then established, some of the members formed another meeting at St. Jean Baptiste Church. Tony A. chaired that second meeting called "Generations". He also went to the "Hope for Adult Children" meeting during this period. The "Generations" meeting was not affiliated with any organization. For about six months it operated with no format. Members of that group vehemently encouraged Tony to do something to formalize, to legitimize, to do something, anything, to establish the group.

So Tony sat down at work the following morning and, in two hours, jotted down thirteen characteristics of the fellowship. He said of the experience, "It was as if Someone Else was writing the list through me." Tony worked near Chris. She had offered to type up the list, so he ran it over to her. She typed up the thirteen characteristics. They Tony realized he'd forgotten to add that little piece about fear. "No, they'd never admit fear. Excitement. Yeah, better. They'd accept 'excitement'. We became addicted to excitement..."

He also wrote "The Solution". Chris edited "The Solution". Things like "God" became "he/she/it" in the transformation. When Tony read the characteristics at the next meeting, one of

the members, Barry said, "Hey, that's my laundry list!" That list of fourteen characteristics has since been called "The Laundry List".

This was the official beginning of ACA (ACoA). No one quite remembers the date of this most auspicious occasion, but who would have expected these humble beginnings to become a worldwide movement to stop child abuse from the inside? "When it began," Tony said, "there was a wonderful feeling of mutual love, empathy, and understanding."

They did try working with the AA Steps at the "Generations" meeting, but most of the early members felt these Steps did not apply to them.

About that time, a lady visiting from Houston asked for a copy of "The Laundry List". She took it to Texas to begin a meeting there. A gentleman by the name of Jack E. was moving to California. And there was a lady from Switzerland.

After a "Generations" meeting one evening in late 1979 or early 1980, two ladies approached Tony. They were from the General Services of Al-Anon and invited the "Generations" group to join Al-Anon. The only real stipulation was that the meeting had to discontinue using "The Laundry List". The group unanimously agreed that it would not give up its "Laundry List".

This was the beginning of the movement away from Al-Anon. In 1979, there was an article published in Newsweek about Claudia Black, Stephanie Brown, and Sharon Wegscheider. It was the very first nationwide announcement that the family dynamics in an alcoholic household could and did cause lifelong patterns of dysfunctional behavior. That article was, in essence, the second piece of ACA literature. With the tremendous acceptance of the Family Systems concept in Mental Health through daytime talk-show hosts, the literature from outside the program blossomed. For a beginning program with a crusader overtone, there was general enthusiasm from the fellowship to accept the use of outside literature.

At this time AA people were looking at Tony like he was a little crazy. Seems he was advocating a departure from the AA Steps. In 1978 or 1979, with the help of Don D., he wrote some Steps he felt were more fitting for victims of abuse. These Steps encouraged taking the inventory of the parents and indulging oneself in self-pity for being a victim; this is now referred to in mental health community as "grief work". Tony couldn't see the logic in the idea of being "restored to sanity" since "restoration" means to be given back something one once had, "Coming from sick homes, we didn't have any sanity to begin with."

Keeping in mind that Tony was a concurrent member of AA, he nevertheless felt "The Twelve Traditions of AA" were limiting for this particular program. He didn't see the use of the Traditions then, and he doesn't see it today. He also doesn't feel the concept of anonymity is as important in ACA as it is in AA. "Anonymity is needed so we don't talk about other members and their stories. I feel that personal anonymity can be broken on any level --- press, radio, etc. After all, anonymity can be a sick family secret rather than healthy."

Tony began to feel he was being put into the position of an authority figure, something he never wanted to be. "I was terrified of authority figures, and of becoming one. An authority figure, to me, can be a perpetrator." He also feared the impact on his own recovery from all the attention. He turned over the meeting and stayed away from the program. When he returned for a visit, there was a hush over the room when he entered. It was a heady ego-rush, but he was concerned about his own recovery, as well as the program having individuals "greater than" others. It just didn't feel right for ACA. So in 1981, he became a dropout and attended Al-Anon in the interim.

As he left New York in 1981, some of the women in the "Hope for Adult Children of Alcoholics" group formally asked Al-Anon to adopt the format and literature of ACA. This is why there are "Adult Children" focus meetings in Al-Anon today that are not affiliated with the ACA World Services.

When Tony moved to Florida he was asked if he would start a Tuesday night ACA meeting at Bethesda-by-the-Sea. He had started a few meetings in the area before that, but this was the meeting that survived. Then another meeting sprang up in Delray, another in Sarasota, then down in the Keys, then Orlando...

In 1985, Tony got a call from an ACA member, Marty S., in California. Someone there was taking credit for writing "The Laundry List". Marty encouraged Tony to come out of anonymity to establish himself as the legitimate founder of the ACA program. Tony never claimed to be THE founder of ACA. He accepted the title of Co-Founder, giving credit to the four or five members of the original "Hope for Adult Children" meeting. He is, however, the person who penned the original characteristics that define our fellowship.

A former stockbroker in New York, Tony A. was counseling indigents at the same time he was continuing to be a stockbroker in Florida. In 1988, he went to work for the Palm Beach Institute and began to write a book entitled, The Laundry List, published outside the program in 1991.

"I never expected ACoA to become a worldwide program when it began," said Tony. "We were working on trying to keep a little meeting going back then. The first time I got a glimpse that ACoA has national or international possibilities was when Barry said to copyright 'The Laundry List'. He did foresee this, but I had no idea. I felt 'The Laundry List' should be anonymous at that time and never copyrighted it."

He also said, "The concept of Adult Child came from the Alateens who began 'Hope for Children of Alcoholics' meeting. The original members of our fellowship, who were over eighteen years old, were adults, but as children they grew up in alcoholic homes. 'Adult Child' also means that when confronted, we regress to a stage in our childhood. There are three parts of me: the Higher Power, me, and Little Tony. I have to love little Tony, my child within, if I'm ever going to unite with God. Little Tony is my connection to God. I learned this from a Hawaiian Kahuna teaching. Several months afterwards I heard about the Inner Child work beginning in the therapeutic community."

Asked about the ACA program, Tony replied, "I don't feel qualified to talk to organizations. When we started the "Generations" meeting, it was anti-organizational. I do hope ACA continues having an open literature policy. My wish for the fellowship is to use the original "Laundry List" and the new ACoA Steps written in my book for the victims that we are."

Tony concluded the interview saying, "This program is about learning to love myself and then others unconditionally. We are not God-connected if we don't. Trust has to become a process, and love is a process. When I can trust and love me, I can trust and love others. I think we have to become as little children. Feelings are the Spiritual Path of an adventure to know God. Our goal is God."

Timeline

1935

- AA began.

- Alanon began.

1957

- Alateen began.

1976

- Jack E. speaks at Alateen meeting.

1977

- Adult “Graduates” of Alateen program continued to meet.
- Tony A. was invited as a guest speaker.
- Tony A. wrote the characteristics of the group, “The Laundry List”.

1978

- Alateen "graduates" began to allow "older" people to attend meetings; Jack E. joins them.

1979

- Jack E. moved to Los Angeles, CA.
- Newsweek article on the impact of alcoholism on families

1980

- Houston meetings began using New York meeting literature.
- Jack E. began an ACA meeting in Los Angeles.

1981

- Tony A. moved to Florida and took program materials.
- Tony A. received a call from Marty S. in Los Angeles asking Tony to claim “The Laundry List” as others are claiming it as their own.
- Tony A. published the book, “The Laundry List”.

1983

- A meeting was called in Southern California to decide what to do about a \$200 conference debt when the bank account held only \$28.46. This group evolved into the Interim Central Service Committee (ICSC).
- ICSC adopted the 12 Steps and the 12 Traditions.
- ICSC formed the Identity, Purpose, and Relationship Committee.
- ICSC hosted a "Unity Gathering".

1984

- The Identity, Purpose, and Relationship Committee sent out a questionnaire to meetings to gather information about the identity of this program, the purpose of this program, and the relationship of this program to other 12-Step programs.
- Marty S. studied PTSD and biofeedback; he found PTSD characteristics similar not identical to the ACA identifying characteristics.
- The ComLine newsletter was first published in October.

- The first Annual Business Conference convened in Redondo Beach, CA.
- ACA becomes an independent 12-Step organization.
- The ABC delegates adopt the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions.
- The ABC delegates mandates the formation of Intergroups.
- The ABC accepts the report of the Identity, Purpose, and Relationship Committee, "The ACA Program and How it Works".

1985

- Marty S. calls Tony and encourages him to claim the copyright on "The Laundry List" characteristics.
- The first Intergroup forms in San Diego, CA; others quickly follow.
- The Central Service Board (CSB) installs a telephone line.
- CSB begins office services.

1986

- In January is the third ABC.
- The second "Identity Paper", "Finding Wholeness in Separation..." is presented and accepted at the ABC.

1987

- "The Importance of Service in ACA" is presented and accepted at the Jan. ABC.
- A decision is made by ABC delegates to allow CSB to do their region work as well as to function as the interim World Service Organization (iWSO).
- Identity Committee recommends that a committee be formed by ABC delegates to create a proposal for ACA world service structure and operation while the interim group continues registering meetings, sending out literature, meeting formats, and general information, responding to mail and telephone calls, and helping people find meetings.
- APACA (Anonymous Programs of Adult Children of Alcoholics) committee is formed at the ABC to create a proposal for the form and operation of ACA world services.

1988

- Tony A. moves to Florida
- APACA committee leaders arrived at ABC in Connecticut intending to be the new world service board. Delegates expected a report to be presented as that was the mandate to that committee. An argument ensued and the APACA committee people left angry. The fellowship membership seemed to have dropped as a result of this misunderstanding as to the mission of the committee.

1989

- CSB operated as WSO with the approval of the ABC delegates.
- The committees were: ABC, Incorporation, Bylaws, Literature, Sponsorship, Identity, ComLine newsletter, Liaison, Office, and Automation (database).
- There are 1300 meetings worldwide.

1991

- The Laundry List book was published outside the program.

ACA Came West (1976-1979): Jack E.

At the First Anniversary Meeting of ACA (on the west coast of the United States), a young mother gratefully shared, "This morning, my five-year old daughter told me, 'Mama, I hate you.' Thanks to this program, that transaction was over for me the minute she said it. I've learned to treat my daughter as a child, not an adult."

In my own home, a child was judged as an adult who should have known better, and was given the burden of guilt and shame. That woman's daughter will be raised with a healthy Inner Child, because her family is functioning without the burden of dysfunctional guilt and shame.

My family was dysfunctional. I believe that alcoholism is truly a family disease. Untreated, it affects all members of the family. Denial was practiced in my family. My mother and father were both children of alcoholic fathers. I did not learn of my grandfather's alcoholism from either of my parents. Alcoholism was considered then, as it is now by most people, to be shameful. It was not considered to be a disease, but a weakness, so the drinking by my grandfathers was never mentioned.

I grew up to be an alcoholic who drank and married other alcoholics. I was not conscious of wanting to rescue and be rescued, but those feelings were below the surface.

My father was not an alcoholic. My mother was an alcoholic who was a child of an alcoholic. She was in a severe accident when she was in her teens and was not, in the doctor's opinion, able to survive childbirth. Nevertheless, my mother had two children, a high-risk, heroic act of an adult child of an alcoholic. My mother was a relatively young woman when she died, the price she paid for having and supporting children as a single parent. I believe that alcoholism contributed to the accident that killed her. She was not intoxicated at the time of her fatal accident, but without the effects of alcoholism, she would not have had that accident.

This guilt lingered through my years in AA and Al-Anon. It gave me great motivation to practice 12-Step principles as I searched for a solution.

In 1976, a friend from AA invited me to speak at a meeting of young Al-Anon members. These members, in their early twenties, decided they were not getting enough solution from a meeting that primarily dealt with spousal problems. I spoke at several meetings, but failed to grasp the issues. After all, I was not in my early twenties. I was interested but not deeply involved. I knew some of the young people from regular Al-Anon. Sympathy existed in my heart, but not empathy.

In late 1978, empathy blossomed. By that time, the young people permitted "older" people to join them in their spiritual investigation. I was holding down two jobs, so my attendance at meetings was limited. My interest became passion by the time I accepted employment in Los Angeles, California, in November 1979.

There was no ACA meeting to attend in L.A. In AA and Al-Anon I shared my experience, strength, and hope but something was missing. I had discovered a hole in my center, and it hurt. In August 1980, I invited some people from Al-Anon to join me at my home in Santa Monica. We conducted a "feasibility study". We took a look at our family lives, our relationships, and our parents that first evening and decided to formalize the meeting.

I presented the Laundry List that was used at New York meetings of children of alcoholics; no formal name or initials existed at that point. The group did not approve the

language on the list of identifying characteristics, and I promised to present a revised list called "The Problem" at our second meeting.

Everyone was surprised to see our numbers had doubled at the second meeting. They doubled again at the third meeting.

In the beginning we weren't sure that anyone shared our curiosity, let alone commitment, but they did. They sure did. We outgrew my apartment, then outgrew the church in Westwood, and continued to grow. Other meetings sprang up. In sixty days, meetings spread to Hollywood, Mar Vista, and Rolling Hills.

I served as the Thomas Jefferson in the beginning. Many drafts of "The Problem" and "The Solution" readings were presented, often with only a few words changed from the original. We felt a deep commitment to unconditional love of self and parent and Higher Power, just as ACAs do today.

As I write this, a handbook is envisioned. So is a seminar on the Steps. Both are new undertakings, another part of the constant rebirth of the love reflected in our ACA program and principles. The outreach to the world began very modestly. We did the best we could in the beginning. We overcame a lot of obstacles. We could only dream of the activities you continue to create, year after year. It's just amazing, and it's great.

We knew you were coming, so we baked a cake at the First (west coast) Anniversary Meeting of ACA. We knew you were coming, but we didn't dream how great you would be, so rich in achievement and growing numbers. If anyone asks me if ACA is "better" now than it was, I answer, "Yes, because there are more of us."

ACA Found its Own Identity (1979 – 1988) - Marty S.

In 1979, I'd come west for a form of feeling therapy popular at the time. By the end of two years I'd realized that getting deep into your feelings and letting out all the stuffed emotion was a component of recovery, but I was half-crazed at that point. I was terrified to move. I knew all the people and we would have to live together in group homes and share expenses for support. But I had to do something. My incest issues had never been touched in counseling.

Therapists knew nothing of Post Traumatic Stress (PTSD). The alcoholism in my family had never been mentioned. This was the state in psychology, 12-Step programs and health organizations of the time. This was before they understood that people had been hurt and beaten up and had good reason to be the way they are. As a graduate student where I was taking a seminar on current therapy techniques, the class was very small. We were asked to study a current technique and report back our findings. Everybody would share so we would learn about the latest techniques. None of the methods I saw at the time seemed as if they would benefit me in my recovery.

At that time I didn't even know I was a multiple personality or that I had been ritually abused.

I had ideas of using biofeedback, not to reduce muscle tension and blood pressure, but to find out what would make the indicators rise and fall in terms of intensity. I found but one paper that addressed biofeedback in that way, Marge Toomin's paper on "Chemical Use of Biofeedback Response in Therapy". I carried that paper to her office, ostensibly to take her classes in biofeedback. After five sessions of the standard biofeedback application, I told her I needed more sessions. She said, "You don't need biofeedback, you need psychotherapy." I used both.

At the same time I met a woman who was in Alcoholics Anonymous. One day when talking with her and another AA member, I said something about my father's drinking. She asked me if I thought my father might have been an alcoholic. I never had, and I erupted with rage, "I don't want to hear any of the AA stuff, and I don't want to go to Al-Anon either!" My reaction to the question was so powerful that even I couldn't help but notice. "What was that about?" I wondered. I was smack up against the denial surrounding dissociation in alcoholism.

She'd given me "The Problem" statement to read. She'd picked me up when Jack E. was giving a talk out at the university. One day when I was distraught, I asked her, "Where are these Al-Anon meetings?" I went in there in a haze. The people were nice. I didn't know what they were reading. I didn't even care why they were reading it. I didn't actually know what I was doing in the room other than the program was supposed to help to people. I was grasping desperately.

The therapy I had switched to was deeper than the one before it. Powerful emotions were coming up. I could only go to one meeting a week; that was all I could take. All I heard was "Keep coming back." They'd shake hands at the end after some prayer. The words meant nothing. I was just hiding in the back of the room with people. When I had to put another meeting on my schedule I asked my friend who had every 12-Step directory where there was another meeting.

I was losing my composure completely when I walked into that meeting. They read "The Problem" statement. I listened to it. This time I heard it. After the meeting, Jack E. picked me up off the floor in a big bear-hug. He force-fed me coffee and sugar, bought me a hamburger, and then stayed with me for a little while.

I went to the next meeting. I soon learned the difference between Al-Anon and Al-Anon with an ACA focus. "The Problem" was not among Al-Anon's "Conference Approved Literature". In some meetings we kept it in boxes under the table. There were alcoholics in ACA, too. I believe there was a rule in Al-Anon that an alcoholic couldn't hold a service position above the meeting level. This was one of the rationales to separate from Al-Anon, I believe. Being ACAs first, and alcoholics second, this enraged everyone. There seemed to be a situational, structural, and directional friction. Some people were starting to say, "It's not the alcoholic alone, it's the home." That idea was not in concert with AA or Al-Anon ideology then. Yet it was healing for people to say that or be able to come out and break the taboo of speaking about it.

A group in the South Bay got together and formed an interim Central Service Board (iCSB) that was to meet in July 1983. A bunch of us met at TRW and some motions were passed. One was about finances, the usual set-up needs. I brought up an important issue that Jack E. had written in a paper entitled, "Addenda in Support of an Agenda." He posed the questions, "Should we accept outsiders (people from dysfunctional, not alcoholic, homes)? Should we be open to them? Should we remain in alliance, ideal-wise, with Al-Anon and AA?" His answers were "Yes". He didn't want to be part of anything that was not Steps and Traditions. He also said, "Until such time as Adult Children of Schizophrenics and Adult Children of Gamblers occur in a "hiving off" process that would probably happen, we probably constituted the only help these people had, so they should be included. The whole idea, right from the very beginning, was addressed. It wasn't a problem to anybody at the start. The notion that we're only for Adult Children of Alcoholics didn't come up until much later. It wasn't there initially, because people would just wander in and say, "I never saw anybody drink in my family, but it sounds just like the home where I was raised." No one was ever asked to leave!

I joined one of the committees called "The Identity, Purpose, and Relationship to other

12-Step Programs", a long-winded title for a committee. It was to report back its findings and recommendations at the next business conference, not to the Central Service Board. One man took over as the Chairperson, and the four of us met religiously every month for a year. After a while the total grandiosity of that particular motion started to become apparent: all aspects of ACA identity, purpose, and relationship to all other programs. For the first six months we sat there and stared at each other. What on earth are we supposed to do?" Then January came. We were due to hold another conference.

Our leader had to drop out for personal reasons, so I volunteered to Chair the committee.

We decided we needed to ask the fellowship what they thought about who we were. We wrote twelve questions such as, "Do you consider this a 12-Step program?" We got back forty-six letters. We recorded their concerns. The issue mentioned most often was whether ACA was to be a 12-Step program. The next concern was how the childhood wounds affected our lives as adults. In June of 1984, Jim C. was going to put out the first issue of the ComLine newsletter, and he asked me to write something about the program in 750 or 800 words. When I started writing I realized this was the committee's report on who we were, "The ACA Program and How It Works".

I could only write a couple of sentences, and then I'd have to lie down and cry. I'd felt terrible. It was like I was taking an inventory as I was writing that first Identity paper, an inventory unlike anything I'd ever put right in front of me before. It was an inventory about abuse, about being abused. I struggled through it for three weeks. After it was written, my two committee members said the report needed to be gentler. Then we added the phrase, "Love dissolves hate" and put in the paragraph, "We will give ourselves the love we seek."

Jim published the report in the ComLine. This report was the first item on the agenda at the November 1984 Annual Business Conference. The big agenda item was for autonomy for our own independent organization. I read the Identity Report aloud, and then I called for a motion to vote for autonomy. The vote was 48 to 2 for autonomy. The two people who voted "no" said it was not by personal preference, but by group conscience. One of those groups folded shortly thereafter and the other joined the new ACA fellowship.

Out of the 1984 conference came the directive to put together a Board of Trustees and to host a meeting in January to form a rudimentary Intergroup system. In January, 1986 we delivered the second report of the Identity, Purpose, and Relationship Committee, "Finding Wholeness Through Separation: The Paradox of Independence."

Each of the "Identity Papers" was, to some degree, addressing program identity, purpose, and relationship. I was trying to define what the original function was. The first paper was why we had that separate identity. The next one was our general orientation.

At the end of that ABC were the motions. Since we were operating for the last year as the de facto organizational focal point, as evidenced from the incoming calls and mail, the decision was made to label this body as an "interim World Service". To this end we sent out a letter to ACA groups asking them to tell us what they were doing.

The agenda item was for the Identity Committee to consider how to form a permanent World Service Organization and come back with recommendations. The delegates decided to label the service board the Central Service Board for Southern California and the interim World Service Organization. To support that activity delegates voted for the combined service board to accept 10% of the 7th Tradition donations from ACA groups to carry out the responsibilities of the interim World Service. There was serious, lengthy discussion on this controversial issue.

The next year, in February, 1987, we presented the third Identity Paper, "The Importance

of Service.” I said, “The Identity Committee was asked to evaluate and look at the service structure. I said, "This seems premature until a lot more people have input; this report addresses only the idea of service in general." This was my recommendation to form a committee to make a study of how to structure and operate a World Service.

We called the committee "Anonymous Programs of Adult Children of Alcoholics" (APACA) because ACA groups around the country were calling themselves different things. To call them ACAs would be uncomfortable for them if they originated under different names such as ACoA or Children of Alcoholics (CoA). It was to be a rubric under which people actually doing the same thing would have a committee to explore our collective identity. I called it a “conference committee”. I don't know what a “conference committee is to this day”; it's not in the ACA by-laws. APACA was to be a committee with comprehensive representation of our fellowship empowered by the ABC to gather the group conscience, synthesize it, and make recommendations of how to structure and operate the ACA World Service. The ABC gave the committee three questions and the local APACA committees were to add three of their own, prioritized concerns. They could send in a tape and transcript of the proceedings, a summary of the question, high points, and their answers. This was to be used, with the information the incumbent Board had of what worked for AA's and OA's structure, to modify the existing operation and structure of ACA World Services. The function of the committee was to gather this information from our far-reaching fellowship. That's the way it was set up.

I was nominated to Chair the APACA committee, but I was overworked and emotionally spent, so I declined. Some motions were pushed through that the APACA committee be called a "committee of the conference", not reporting to the interim World Service Board, but only to the Annual Business Conference. Ideally there would be open communication, contact, and responsible leadership updating the sitting Board as to the progress of the information gathering.

All APACA had to do was to send out questionnaires, collect them, synthesize the responses, and make recommendations in their report to the next Business Conference. At the Connecticut ABC the next year, instead of presenting the report, the committee members present demanded immediate sovereignty over all World Service operations and monies. They were overruled, and they left.

The Board of Trustees that hoped for and expected a cadre of new leaders and enthusiastic workers to improve and expand WSO services for the greater good of the fellowship was greatly disappointed at the result of this most unfortunate misunderstanding. Instead of wider representation, better services, and more comprehensive services, the continuing Board still had too many on-going, daily responsibilities to effectively plan a more efficient World Service structure. I just hope we have learned from this mistake to make clear in writing the responsibilities that go with Board and Conference directives and to select leaders who have program recovery as well as procedural understanding and integrity.

Putting Together the Organization (1980 – 1986) - Whitey B.

It took a specific incident to trigger my feelings of service for ACA. We had started having general discussions of an ACA service structure at the Friday Night Meeting in Torrance, California, after the meeting. Someone had been organizing an ACA conference and collecting money for it, but we never received any accounting for the money that was collected. Not being a terribly trusting soul, I said I didn't want to put any more of "my" money into an organization where there was no accounting. One of the less dysfunctional ACAs at the meeting chirped, "I

think we hear a volunteer for the ACA Treasurer!" So it began.

We continued meeting regularly and discussions got heated until we moved the meeting to our homes on a rotating basis. We also had a rotating leadership of the meeting.

I worked with Cathi W., who was a co-treasurer at the time, to come up with a policy for meetings. The policy required at least two signatures to set up a bank account. The policy for donations evolved. After a meeting paid for its operating expenses, and had a prudent reserve saved, it was to send the excess funds to the intergroup, region, and acting world service boards. It soon became clear that if meetings did not get rid of extra money to Central Service Bureau (CSB), no one ever knew what happened to the money they donated.

We tried to work with Al-Anon, and we wanted to read "The Problem" and "The Solution" in our meetings. We felt like a bunch of kids trying to organize kids. It seemed that when one of us received any "power", then one or another of us would go on a power trip (literature, the keys to the mailbox...) to try to get our way. It reminded me of my alcoholic household. There were many times when I didn't see how we would ever resolve the issues that came up, but we kept coming back. We held hands at the end of these meetings and usually said the "Serenity Prayer".

There was a difference between the ACA service family and my family of origin. No matter how ineffective things seemed, the group Higher Power was there when we looked.

We tried to get Al-Anon to approve our literature, especially "The Problem" and "The Solution". It seemed that Al-Anon was behaving like our collective "critical parent", and the message I always seemed to get back was "rewrite your literature until it is good enough!" One more time I was not good enough. This issue eventually led to the first Business Conference at TRW cafeteria in Manhattan Beach, California.

Another big issue that came up in the beginning was the requirement for identifying as an ACA. Most people at the time believed that it was quite clear; one or the other of one's parents had to be an alcoholic. Yet people kept wanting to come to meetings that were children of overeaters, gamblers, etc. Sometimes there was no alcoholic behavior, but sometimes grandparents were alcoholics. It became clear it was not our parents' drinking that affected us so much, but it was the effect of growing up in a dysfunctional household pattern that was so damaging. I was glad I stood up for my belief at the time that the only requirement for ACA membership was to identify with "the Problem".

I can't remember if we broke away from Al-Anon at the first or second conference of ACA at TRW. Naturally, we had a lot of issues. We had to come up with our own agenda and stick to it, too! In the beginning we didn't see how we could conduct a productive business conference in less than three days. But, with HP's help, everything meaningful got done in one day. We all needed to learn about boundaries. It was very exciting when we did break away from Al-Anon; it was also very scary. It felt like we were saying "No!" to our critical parents, and it felt great to be so independent.

We didn't have much structure. We were still working on a common definition of "the Problem", let alone "the Solution! I kept waiting for my "punishment" to come. I kept waiting for ACA to fall apart without enough structure like AA seemed to have. It was my first lesson that I, like ACA, have my own process, that it is very scary to give up control, and that HP can best take over when I do let go. It seemed that ACA needed to learn to give up its identity with Al-Anon completely before ACA could establish its own identity.

Once we broke away from Al-Anon, progress was more rapid, although not terribly

smooth. During one of the conferences in West L. A., we brought in a Parliamentarian. It was the last time we tried that! It almost seems that we were trying to recreate the very pattern we had just broken away from! In spite of our fledgling awkwardness, I think it was at this conference that we finally adopted the formal definition of "the Problem".

The Treasurer's Committee, like the rest of ACA, was a very slowly evolving process. We were organized, but not that organized. Balancing the budget seemed to reflect this process. In my sixth year, with the help of a computer, we finally got it balanced! It was a great way for me to avoid my relationship problems at the time. I often told my girlfriend I had to record the incoming ACA donations. Then I would watch some horror movies on cable TV until the wee hours of the morning as I listed the amounts. There may be a clue here as to why it was difficult to balance the accounts then.

At my last business conference in San Diego, I felt sad. I went out like a lamb and I wanted to go out like a lion. I took on the same role in ACA that I did in my family --- the lowest profile with the most expectations of myself. My parents expected me to be their magnificent son, yet they gave me little validation. In deciding to be the ACA Treasurer I wanted to be "visible", but not that visible.

The most important lesson I learned in service was what "giving" really means. My initial motivations were not inspired by "unconditional love". My motivation ranged from escaping home, to needing an identity, to being visible. Although my initial motivation may not have been the most spiritual, I did learn how to give by practicing giving service. When I gave service to get something in return, not only did I not get what I wanted, but also I was not terribly effective giving either. When I did give for the sake of giving, I was also able to give myself the most priceless gift of all --- the unconditional love I never received as a child. Sometimes (I never knew when) my HP would also give me "joy of giving".

Giving service to ACA allowed me to work the Steps, especially the first three steps, better than any other area of my life. Many times as I was driving to an ACA CSB meeting, I would hear a not-so-little voice inside me saying, "Why are we doing this? We could be going to the beach instead! For what? We want to know what the rewards of giving are before we give service." Intellectually I knew from the first step that I can't know the rewards of anything before I do it, including giving. Since I am powerless over result, I can't expect good feelings either.

Giving service in ACA provided me a safe environment so that sometimes I could emotionally surrender my will to my HP. These were the times when I had some hope of truly giving. What I got when I gave service to ACA was not "immediate gratification". It was real; it didn't fade in time; it was quality; it was more than I ever had before. For once in my life I could count on something. I could not count on receiving, for receiving depended on factors beyond my control. I could only count on truly giving.

In retrospect I can see that the times when I thought I was "giving up the beach" for giving service to ACA, I was really coming from scarcity and neediness, not abundance. I needed an "attitude lube job" no matter which one I did. I probably would not have enjoyed the beach coming from scarcity either. Providing service to ACA helped me learn how to give myself an attitude adjustment.

I usually came out of the CSB meetings with a greater feeling of abundance than when I went in, as long as I did not have any "hidden agendas" ahead of time. What giving service to ACA has given me is priceless. I am also breaking the cycle with my own kids. ACA has helped me be the happy, glad, sad, crying, laughing "human being" father to my kids that my "human-doing" father could never be to me. ACA has helped me get in touch with my Inner Child,

Whitey Bee, and this is the most priceless treasure of all.

I see the service structure of ACA as being the heart of ACA: the foundation of hope, especially for others like myself who can break the cycle and provide role models for the next generation. ACA would never have been born if people were not willing to take risks and give up the god of "Immediate Gratification", so honored by my parents, to start a service structure.

ACA Evolved and Grew (1986 – 1987) - Lori H.

It was either '86 or '87 when I attended the first business conference in Westwood, California. We had some service meetings for the Central Service Board (CSB) of Southern California meetings. The third time we had gotten together we realized we needed someone to chair these meetings. A decision was made at the Business Conference for CSB to take on the role of interim World Service.

I volunteered to become chairperson for this meeting. The three-month trial basis for which I volunteered was extended to two years.

We started to create an organizational structure. For six months we focused on how we could become more effective as a service group with committees. We discussed how the committees could be more effective and still be an integral part of the Service Board. In the first six months we also developed the plans for Officers (President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer) and Committee Chairs. After six to nine months we finally got all the positions filled on the Executive Committee and the Committee Chairs.

We talked about what the Board as a whole wanted to accomplish and what each committee would do. Then we established priorities. Willie was the Secretary. We taped all of the Board meetings and he transcribed the tapes. He kept notes of all the proposed projects. When someone had a "great idea" it went on a list that Willie kept. We discovered quickly that between the people on the Board, incoming requests from the fellowship, and the direction from the Business Conference, the work was just too much. Each committee Chair was given a list of the items from CSB, the fellowship, and the ABC that pertained to their area, and each chose their priorities. The key guideline for us was to always ask ourselves, "What do we have the resources to do?" The resources meant the people as well as the money. Based on the limitations, the Chairpersons were charged to do their best in their area. If they felt they wanted more support or guidance, they would bring those issues to the Board meeting and the Board as a whole would try to help solve the problem or give that person further guidance.

Marty S. took on the role to remind us of the directions given to us by the Business Conference delegates. If our priorities were not in line with the approved ballot items passed at the Business Conference, then we were out of line. We were very careful to observe the direction of the fellowship communicated to us at the Business Conference, both what they wanted us to do and what they didn't want us to do. It was during my term as Chairperson that Marty and a couple of other members of the fellowship developed the model for the service structure. Instead of having the CSB/iWSO at the top of the triangle, the regional service boards, and then the meetings and then the individuals, we flipped the triangle over. The model then depicted the individuals at the top who directed what happened at the meetings, the meetings which directed what happened at the regional service board level, and the service boards directed what happened at the World Service level, which was now on the bottom.

In the dual capacity as the Central Service Board for Southern California and as the interim World Service, committees volunteers became confused as to what work we were doing

for Southern California as the CSB and what we needed to do on a larger scale for the rest of the world. For a year and a half we worked on defining our boundaries. It was important for us to act as the Central Service Board for Southern California because the Intergroups were not very well established at that time. As the Intergroups were more capable of taking on more responsibility for meeting referrals, for the directories, and for handling ACA business in their area, we let go of that responsibility and got more focused on World Service business.

For the first six months we had no office space. We were working out of Joe A.'s apartment. He manned the phones and the computers. He was also the Chairperson for the ComLine newsletter or he mailed it out. We started to gradually increase the number of people on the committees. We established an Office Committee and rented the first office space in Hollywood. We spent months prioritizing the office responsibilities: updating meeting information; providing meeting information to individuals; responding to phonecalls for information. With so much coming in, we had to decide how to use our people and our money to get the office work done. During the second year Charlie Ann took over as Chair of the Office Committee and moved the office to Torrance. She developed the office procedures and upgraded the typewriter, answering machine, and the computer.

Joanie M. and I organized the Business Conference. The entire Board helped put together the ballots. We decided what issues recurred over the year on which we needed the guidance of the fellowship, and we turned them into ballot items. One of the biggest hits of the two Business Conferences I worked on were "The Identity Papers" developed by Marty S. and his Committee on Identity, Purpose and Relationship. We supported him in the effort.

It was the Business Conference in San Diego where the delegates voted we drop the "interim" on IWSO (interim World Service Organization) and we became World Service. Shortly thereafter that I left the role of Chairperson. Willie B. was elected to that position when I left.

I moved shortly thereafter to Connecticut. There I got involved with the Service Board in Connecticut and found the Chairperson of that Service Board had volunteered to host the next Business Conference. I Co-Chaired the Convention Committee which put on the Convention and hosted the Business Conference as well.

At that Business Conference there was major controversy. A group of people were actively trying to get the WSO disbanded prior to and at the Business Conference. I chose to again get involved with World Service because of this and was elected as the Northeast Regional Representative.

At that Business Conference, we developed the new structure for the Service Board to include representatives from different parts of the U.S.A. and the world. We adjusted the requirements for who could be a Board member. We amended the requirement that Board members had to attend three consecutive Board meetings since it eliminated people outside California from getting elected to the Board. We also restructured the Service Board to include nine Regions and elected Regional Representatives for seven out of those nine areas. We chose to have monthly conference calls as our Board meetings on every third Saturday, and four times per year we were required to go in person to a Board meeting. We offered California for the first meeting. The last day at the Business Conference a motion was made to disband APACA. That led the APACA Chairperson to resign which, in effect, disbanded APACA. The WSO could then focus more on what the fellowship was directing us to do through the ballot items.

As Chairperson for CSB, CSB/IWSO, IWSO, and WSO, I got an intense education as to how to work with a variety of personalities, maintain unity and focus, and be effective, given that we were a group of dysfunctional participants doing World Service operations for a program

teaching us how to behave responsibly. We agreed to cooperate, to let go of our personal opinions, and to focus on what we felt was best for the fellowship. I was faced everyday with lessons on how to "let go and let God". I recognized at the outset I was not in control of this group of people, this Board of Trustees, or the work that we were doing. I was facilitating to help the Board evolve to the point where it could be effective. Anyone and everyone who showed up was received and accepted to whatever level they were able and willing to participate. Our resources in terms of volunteers and money were very limited. It was not easy. We had extremely dedicated people working well above and beyond the call of duty to effect the speedy transition from regional preoccupation to providing efficient and effective global services. Many times I observed how the Higher Power worked through individuals and through the service structure. Just when I was ready to give up because there didn't seem to be a solution or a way to accomplish what we wanted to accomplish, suddenly a door opened. The perfect solution came about. I began to trust in the process.

I see the program and the service structure not as separate things, but as a unity. My hope would be to have the people involved in service on all levels, from the meetings, Intergroups, Service Boards, and World Service, be capable of expanding themselves and expanding their vision of the ACA program so that it can become as strong and as supportive as it needs to be to help these millions of ACAs around the world to heal. There's still a considerable way to go. I understand the WSO needs of people willing to participate in service at that level and the financial support to do the work that needs to be done. I wish that the individuals at the meetings and the Intergroups would allow the past to be the past and let go of whatever is keeping them from fully participating on a larger scale. Their participation and support could help bring about the bigger picture, the primary purpose of our program, to make meetings available to many more individuals. Program people in meetings and those in the service structure from bottom to top need to support all the efforts at all the levels. We need to give our financial support. Individuals need to be willing to put in some private time doing service work so the organization can advance and evolve more effectively, so the mission of our program is achieved --- to be available for those who still suffer to work on their own recovery, so we can have a healthier planet.

